

Submission  
No 35

## INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

**Organisation:** Museums and Galleries of NSW

**Date received:** 12 August 2016

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## Museums & Galleries of NSW

Submission to the Legislative Council of NSW, General Purpose Standing Committee  
Number 4, Inquiry into Museums and Galleries.

Terms of Reference;

- 1.** That General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 inquire into and report on the performance or effectiveness of the NSW Government agencies responsible for the organisation, structure and funding of museums and galleries in New South Wales, and in particular:
  - a)** NSW government policy, funding and support for museums and galleries, museum and gallery buildings and heritage collections, including volunteer managed museums and museums managed by councils
  - b)** potential funding impacts on museums and galleries affected by council amalgamations
  - c)** opportunities to revitalise the structure, reach, and impact of museums and galleries, and their research and collecting priorities
  - d)** access to the collections of the Museum 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
  - 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
  - f)** the development and transparency of advice to the government on priorities for NSW museums and galleries
  - g)** the impact of the efficiency dividend on the budgets of museums and galleries over the last 10 years, and funding levels compared to other states
  - 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
  - i)** any other related matter.

# Museums & Galleries of NSW

**INTRODUCTION** to M&G NSW, its services, reach, context and working environment.

**Museums & Galleries of NSW** (M&G NSW) is funded by **Arts NSW** as a **Service Organisation** to develop, support and promote **regional, community and public museums and galleries across NSW**. Sector support also encompasses M&G working with **artist-run spaces** (ARI's) and **Aboriginal cultural centres and keeping places** throughout the state. M&G NSW supports professional staff and volunteers who work in these organisations and their audiences. We have a special allegiance to the tiny, the volunteer, Western Sydney, regional and the remote. M&G NSW has several programs which address particular needs.

M&G NSW's strategy and structure recognises the inherent differences, demands and audiences of the sector. Across these diverse needs, we're involved with **program delivery, exhibition touring, professional/skill development, sector research, small grant/devolved funding and Aboriginal cultural development projects**. Put simply, everything we do is designed to improve skills and participation, to grow and promote sector activity, supporting cultural heritage and the visual arts in metropolitan and regional areas of NSW. [1]

In addition to responding to the NSW Government's Arts and Cultural Policy Framework, *Create in NSW*, **our work is focused** through advice provided by selected **industry peers, sector representative organisations** such as **Regional and Public Galleries NSW** and **Museums Australia**, and our **partner relationships** with **NSW's major cultural institutions** and **Local Government NSW**.

M&G NSW is a not for profit company governed by a skills based board. [2]

## SECTOR SNAPSHOT

In NSW there is an estimated **500 small to medium sized museums and galleries**. 350 are volunteer run museums, the remainder a mix of professionally staffed regional galleries and museums, artist run spaces, Aboriginal cultural centres and keeping places. Several of these combine functions (or co-locate) with libraries, visitor information centres and/or performing arts centres. Local councils provide a significant amount of capital, recurrent and project support. They also contribute to the operations, programs and facility costs of many, although smaller councils find this increasingly difficult to prioritise.

Combined, these 500 'places and spaces' **employ 400 staff, are supported by 8000 volunteers** and are responsible for some **2,900,000 objects in their collections**. Sixty six percent are located outside metropolitan Sydney. In 2012 it was reported that they **welcomed 5,000,000 visitors** and our research suggests that 24% of these were from other places. This statistic signals strong return visitation from locals and significant participation by tourists. [3]

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**NSW regional galleries** enjoy an association with local government in excess of 100 years. They represent long held community aspirations and many have become **significant economic, social, wellbeing and cultural contributors** to the regions they serve. While there are an increasing number of regional museums similarly well supported by local councils, overall the cultural heritage sector (including Aboriginal cultural centres and volunteer run museums) requires access to increased resources and a sharper development focus. [4]

At this point it's worth noting that the volunteer network in the visual arts is not entirely captured in the above tally. That component includes rarely discussed volunteer-run arts and crafts societies (and their programs and collections) that operate through-out the state. In addition, but never statistically captured as part of museum and gallery sector analysis, is the number of commercial galleries (and privately run museums) operating in NSW. The sheer number of volunteers engaged with museums and galleries is testimony to Australia's culture of volunteering and active public spirit, and the value and significance of the museum and gallery sector to the community.

In understanding this snapshot, a more general overview of the NSW museum and gallery sector indicates that just as there are far more volunteer-run museums than public galleries in NSW, there are more commercial galleries than museums. Public institutions, commercial galleries and volunteer-run institutions (whether museums, galleries or art and craft societies), all **form part of the cultural economy and ecology of a healthy sector.** [5]

## 1. POLICY, FUNDING, SUPPORT AND OPPORTUNITIES

In terms of policy, funding, support and opportunities, as a sector and as part of this inquiry process, we believe the following questions should be considered.

- *How do we better support museums and passionate groups of committed volunteers and volunteer cultural heritage organisations across NSW?*
- *How do we better acknowledge and support the visual arts, regional galleries and artist-run initiatives?*
- *How do we best acknowledge and support Aboriginal cultural centres and keeping places and aspirations of Aboriginal people related to their culture?*
- *What might a model that understands and supports the state's significant collections and heritage and which acknowledges their dispersal throughout regional and metropolitan NSW and the complexities of their ownership, preservation and interpretation, look like?*

**Create in NSW** provides a solid framework around which to develop and enact policy to support and achieve best practice outcomes. Through its aim to play an important role in supporting the development of *excellent arts and cultural organisations over the next 10 years*, as a priority, and as an overarching response to the above, we offer the following;

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- M&G NSW recommends that in terms of revitalisation and structural support, a network of **regional centres of excellence** be established to support volunteer museums, community run galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres in NSW.
- With **a strong network of regional/public galleries** and a **growing component of professionally staffed museums**, the bones of such a network already exist.
- Identification of the right model and resources for the network and the centres themselves **requires analysis, consultation and funding** in partnership with federal and state governments, regional and local councils, our major cultural institutions and regional cultural organisations themselves.
- Similar to the **Central West's Sustainable Museum Program** and **Museum of the Riverina's regional outreach program** each centre would be tailored around existing strengths and focus on capacity building in the delivery of a mix of prioritised services covering significance assessment, collection management, curatorial, Aboriginal cultural heritage, conservation, access, community engagement, audience development and online services. [6]
- With direct assistance from M&G NSW to establish and undertake this work, each centre would deliver not only of 'best practice' but a glimpse of 'next practice' - **providing a vision and programs for the future.**
- Support for this initiative would acknowledge that **increased resources, improved partnership capacity and better localised access to professional/skill development** are 'backbone' components of a state-wide **healthy, sustainable and ambitious sector.**
- We also wish to note that the positive impact **residencies, fellowships and mentorships** have on an individual's career is recognised and valued across the sector. Those who have received such support invariably speak highly of the **experience offered.** While there are several programs currently available (including devolved funds from Arts NSW made available through M&G NSW) there is potential to enhance the range and number provided. And importantly, the creation of a network of regional **centres of excellence** would assist in the viability and operation of a reciprocal scheme – **high level skills and professionalism delivered locally – mentorships in reverse.**
- It is widely agreed that more needs to be done to support the maintenance and growth of **NSW Aboriginal culture.** Our regional gallery and museum sector has an important role to ensure that this happens.

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- **The visibility of Aboriginal people and cultures across the NSW sector is a key issue that requires an ongoing strategic priority from all involved.** The inclusion of local Aboriginal cultures, including traditional practices, contact history, contemporary stories and cultural ownership, requires continued improvement and attention.
- All museums and galleries should challenge us to think about the absolute importance of ensuring that **settler stories aren't complete until they recognise the place of First Peoples**, through Aboriginal storytelling, authorship, cultural ownership and participation.
- **Centres of excellence, with Aboriginal staff, Elders-in-residence and access to authoritative local knowledge**, would assist strategic priorities to be achieved.

## 2. IMPACT OF COUNCIL AMALGAMATIONS

- We note that the NSW's Government's ***Fit for the Future*** local government reform program is underway.
- Anecdotally, and through direct contact, **M&G NSW is aware of a range of impacts** affecting museum and gallery services and programs. Some foresee positive outcomes, most envisage change to be negligible (or none at all) and others predict uncertainty, anticipating loss of support.
- There is particular concern for **small volunteer run museums** and their collections. Given many fall outside local government ownership there is a fear that their voice will be **further diminished** and that collections held in trust for the benefit of the whole community, and current and future generations, will be lost in the amalgamation process.
- At the time of writing M&G NSW believes that it's **too early to quantify** the extent of impact or changes that may result from local council amalgamations.

## 3. ACCESS TO THE COLLECTIONS OF MAAS, THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM AND OTHER COLLECTIONS HELD IN TRUST FOR THE PEOPLE OF NSW AND RELATED PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE PHYSICAL AND ONLINE ACCESS.

- For residents of regional NSW, local physical **access to the collections** of MAAS, The Australian Museum, Art Gallery of NSW and others held in trust is dependent on the professionalism and management/environmental/security controls of regional galleries and museums – their **ability to observe standards and criteria set for the safe storage, handling and display of objects and artworks.**

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- Our major CI's (indeed custodians of most collections) require an **assurance of environmental and security controls, professional handling** and due notice when considering any request for loans.
- Most professionally staffed regional museums and galleries comply and can successfully negotiate; however in some instances they can't, **costs are either prohibitive and/or environmental controls cannot be maintained** and prove unreliable within parameters set.
- An idea being considered by some local government bodies, to establish **regional collection stores**, offers the glimpse of a future that might allow collections held in trust for the people of NSW to be more widely distributed and accessible. It's early days however. Where the idea is being considered, **business cases need to be developed and fully scoped to identify models, revenue streams and partnerships** that are possible.
- **Increased support for exhibition touring should be a priority**, as a way of facilitating access to collections and new work by contemporary artists, from metro to regional and vice versa, **exhibition touring** should be given a **funding boost**.
- Increasingly **great museums and galleries are not being defined by the quality of their collections and related programs alone**. Their relevance is also defined by the usefulness and **agility of their online engagement platforms** and related program activity.
- **Online access to collections** and active digitisation programs have democratised and opened up the process, but progress for the regional and small-to-medium sector has been **negatively impacted by unreliable internet access and the short lifespan and commitment shown to several different national digital collection projects** – notably AMOL (Australian Museums on Line), CAN (Collection Access Network) and more recently Trove (National Library).
- **Victorian Collections** is a publicly funded and professionally developed website/information collection management system, free for use by collecting organisations across Victoria. As such it has grown to become a 'go to' showcase of cultural artefacts held by hundreds of organisations across that state. **M&G NSW believes that an opportunity might exist for replication in NSW** – there is certainly a need and the capacity of our small-to-medium sector to manage such involvement, with training and web connection, is relatively strong. [7]

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- Over the past three years, M&G NSW presented a series of skills based workshops in regional centres aimed at encouraging the development of **online keeping places for Aboriginal people and their communities**. A collection database known as **Mukurtu** was at the core of this workshop series. It uses a protocols system for sharing and accessing data that mirrors cultural protocols within Aboriginal communities.
- Inspired by and initially **developed with Aboriginal communities** in the Northern Territory, this US based system is now used by Indigenous communities worldwide, as well as significant institutions such as the Smithsonian, Te Papa and The National Museum of Australia. In addition to its protocol sharing capabilities, Mukurtu offers a high level of security and reliability and is available as open source software (free to download) that can be run independently on a local server or serviced by the US hosts for a fee.
- **A version of Mukurtu is currently being tested by the State Library of NSW** as the basis for encouraging lodgment of documents online with the library or as an independent, community controlled archive utilising the library's server. M&G NSW believes that Murkutu offers a viable and appropriate platform for **Aboriginal communities and individuals to protect, record and share their stories, images and cultural identities**.

M&G NSW's current **website was launched in October 2013**. It provides a comprehensive listing and web profile for over 400 museums, galleries and keeping places in NSW. It's **responsive design and geo-localational functionality** allows users to discover and learn more about any facility's 'proximity' to wherever a user is in NSW. Most individual listings (or micro sites) include collection and program highlights, opening hours and location. [8]

## **4. THE COST BENEFITS OF 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**

- Move needs to ensure that **MAAS's current mission and mandate** - to be Australia's preeminent contemporary museum for excellence and innovation in applied arts and sciences – **are maintained** and that the **integrity of the collection is guaranteed**.
- Proposed move signals an opportunity to recast the museum business model to one based on **free general admission**, for both MAAS and the Australian Museum. **Access, connection and ownership** would be made stronger for all, and



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in particular for a population demographic in Western Sydney that reflects Australia's future make-up and cultural identity.

- **Strong support** has been expressed by many Western Sydney arts, culture and heritage groups and individuals for the planned move of MAAS to Parramatta.
- Parramatta and greater Western Sydney will gain from **social, cultural and economic benefits associated with moving** a dynamic major cultural institution to the city's heart.
- An opportunity for MAAS to **maintain a 'design' profile within the Ultimo precinct** could be explored – including possibility of partner relationships with UTS and Australian Design Centre.

## 5. THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES ON CULTURAL TOURISM, AND THEIR ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE VISITOR ECONOMY IN SYDNEY AND REGIONAL NSW.

- It is well documented that an **active cultural life**, when connected to '*the personality of place*', **promotes a sense of well-being and a distinctiveness that drives destination marketing and cultural tourism** in its broadest sense.
- **Cultural tourism energises visitor economies worldwide.** The experience of place is **inextricably linked to museum and gallery programs**, active and passive engagement with people and their built and natural environments. Like the landscape, **our museums and galleries provide a regular, accessible and direct connection to culture, local heritage and belonging.**
- Museums and galleries are where stories are told and conversations happen. **Landscape and place have a particular relevance to Aboriginal people and culture**, to their stories, acknowledgment of Country and respect of cultural ownership.
- M&G NSW audience research points to the fact that **cultural tourists stay longer** – our data records an average of four days spent per visitor. As reported above, **24% of visitors to NSW regional museums and galleries (5,000,000 in 2012) are categorised as being from another place – intra or interstate, or from overseas.** [9]
- A separate piece of research by Tourism Research Australia (2012), reported **11.5 million domestic day trips that year were cultural and heritage related.** Across Australia, visiting museums or art galleries was the most popular cultural

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activity for both domestic overnight visitors and day trippers, with attendance of 46% and 38% respectively. Visits to historical/heritage buildings, sites or monuments attracted 29% of overnight visitors and 21% of day trippers.

- It is well understood that tourists are motivated to visit by an overall package of attractions, of which cultural activity is but one. Clearly, **museums and galleries have a significant role to play in supporting the visitor economy in Sydney and regional NSW.**
- In addition, social and cultural shifts are constantly impacting on people's lives and especially on how they use their leisure time. Trends show that increasingly **people are looking for new 'experiences'** be they associated with retail, entertainment, tourism or culture.
- Museums and galleries need to keep an eye on the trends that are influencing the type of experiences people expect and be offering opportunities for meaningful interaction **through active participation, volunteering, web-based and virtual engagements.**
- M&G NSW believes that **more can be done to harness capacity for regional NSW to benefit from culture and heritage related tourism** and we welcome Destination NSW's recent announcement about the establishment of six new Destination Networks across the state. [10], [11]
- There is growing evidence that cultural experiences and creative activity have a positive impact on **health and wellbeing**, and that this alone has a significant and positive economic impact across communities. [12]

In conclusion, the development of centres of excellence, increased investment in arts and cultural infrastructure, programs, training and skills development, and a more focused promotion of culture and heritage related attractions – the galleries and museums themselves, regional trails, collections and program highlights, is required. We offer these suggestions in response to selected Terms of Reference as pointers to a way forward; ensuring sector capacity and potential is fully utilized into the future. Museums & Galleries of NSW understands the sector, its various needs and complexity of issues faced.

We look forward to receiving an opportunity to address the committee and to further contributing towards its report to the NSW Parliament.

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- 1 - [http://mgnsw.org.au/media/uploads/files/NSW\\_2016-2018\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_1.pdf](http://mgnsw.org.au/media/uploads/files/NSW_2016-2018_Strategic_Plan_1.pdf)
- 2 - [http://mgnsw.org.au/media/uploads/files/annualreview2015\\_web.pdf](http://mgnsw.org.au/media/uploads/files/annualreview2015_web.pdf)
- 3 - [http://mgnsw.org.au/media/uploads/files/Survey\\_Report\\_130919\\_FINAL\\_1.pdf](http://mgnsw.org.au/media/uploads/files/Survey_Report_130919_FINAL_1.pdf)
- 4 - [http://mgnsw.org.au/media/uploads/files/SCD\\_2015\\_-\\_downloadfinal.pdf](http://mgnsw.org.au/media/uploads/files/SCD_2015_-_downloadfinal.pdf)
- 5 - <http://mgnsw.org.au/organisations/>
- 6 - <http://www.centralnswmuseums.orangemuseum.com.au>
- 7 - <https://victoriancollections.net.au/>
- 8 - <http://mgnsw.org.au/>
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- 10 - <http://www.oroh.com.au/>
- 11 - <http://www.brokenhillaustralia.com.au/explore-and-discover/outback-museum/>
- 12 - <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/publications/cultural-value-project-final-report/>