

**Submission
No 55**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Organisation: Save Bondi Pavilion group

Date received: 13 August 2016

Hon Robert Borsak MLC
Committee Chair
Legislative Council General Standing Committee No. 4

Inquiry into museums and galleries

Dear Chair,

RE: Submission to Inquiry into museums and galleries.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into museums and galleries being held by NSW Parliament. Our submission is in regard to the Bondi Pavilion and will mainly focus on item (h) of the Inquiries' Terms of Reference.

h) the economic impact of museums and galleries on cultural tourism, and their role in supporting the visitor economy of Sydney and regional NSW

Reference is also made to other items on the Inquiry's agenda :

- b) 'council amalgamations',
- c) 'opportunities to revitalize the structure, reach and impact of museums and galleries',
- d) 'access to collections' and
- e) 'alternative strategies to support museum development'.

Coastal Culture.

For the visitor, a museum or art gallery should be a place of explanation and discovery, where the sight, sound or touch of an exhibit offers a meaningful connection. It is through our art and culture that we give a sensory description of our identity as individuals and as a society - and try to explain ourselves to ourselves.

Bondi Pavilion is a suitable location for establishing a museum of culture and history, an idea strongly endorsed by a range of people with interests that revolve around the concept of 'coastal culture'. In particular:

- * Indigenous heritage of eastern Sydney.
- * Bondi being central to the development of surf life saving and surfboard riding.
- * The profound impact beach culture has had on the evolving Australian identity.
- * An appreciation of marine environment in science, sport, fishing and recreation.

From the first day of European settlement white Australia has been an urban coastal culture, but for most of our 228 years the myths and foundation stories have been set in the landscape of the bush or outback. Similarly for many white people their notion of Aboriginal culture is from the remote north and the desert. To establish a museum dedicated to the broad idea of coastal culture at Bondi Beach, on the geographic verandah of Australia's preeminent city, at the threshold of land and ocean, would create the opportunity to exhibit and explore the social, cultural and artistic stories of a nation girt by sea.

Bondi and its Pavilion.

The Bondi Surf Pavilion was opened in the 1929 during an era that produced a profound change in the attitude of Australians to their beaches. The surfers, the lifesavers, and boaties from surf clubs, and Olympic champions from local swimming clubs individually and jointly brought fame, recognition and international attention to Bondi Beach.

Bondi Pavilion began with changing sheds, Turkish baths, a ballroom and a café, then quickly added an outdoor amphitheatre, it has a colourful history which has included a mix of beach and local arts culture. It was home to cabaret, socials and fund-raisers during WWII, fell to neglect during the 1950's and 60's, and was revitalized as an important local place for health, fitness and the arts.

It officially became a Community and Cultural Centre in 1974 with the opening of the theatre, pottery and art studios, and has a continuous thirty-year community music program. It has housed many cultural and community festivals in the decades since, becoming a much loved local creative cultural hub.

Now is a pivotal moment in the Pavilion's history as a current scheme by Waverley Council to turn the heritage listed building into a thoroughly commercial catering and function centre, at great public cost, is meeting with concerted opposition from a variety of community stakeholders.

One reason the Bondi Pavilion has come to the current impasse, where it has been mismanaged and neglected for years by the Council, is the lack of State or Federal oversight for a well-acknowledged national icon. Placing a museum at the Pavilion with State and Federal funding would link the Pavilion to responsible governance and a network of other cultural institutions sharing skills and expertise as well as exhibitions and artefacts.

A museum or interpretive centre?

The establishment of a museum would greatly assist in revitalising the Bondi Pavilion as a cultural hub at our world famous beach. The Bondi identity, a style that locals and outsiders have strong opinions about - is distinctive in standing on the edge of the urban and oceanic, an artful wildness that is recognisable compared to other beachside suburbs. It should be nurtured and encouraged and diversified not just for the Waverley community but also for visitors and travellers who are looking for that 'something different' – a sense of 'local culture' in an increasingly homogenised world.

Perhaps the idea of a 'museum' limits the scope of the possibilities at the Pavilion – an 'interpretive centre' may be a more inclusive model in which to develop the range of concepts about 'coastal culture' and Bondi in particular.

Within the existing building Bondi Pavilion has a 200 seat theatre, art gallery, performance spaces, music and art studios, cafes and a restaurant. With sympathetic architectural changes several areas currently used as council offices and retail tenancy could transform into the proposed space and the Pavilion would be an outstanding community and cultural centre and an educational provider for primary and high school students, and the millions of overseas visitors looking for a deeper experience of Bondi and Australian identity.

Cultural Economy.

The inquiry will be no stranger to the concept of ‘cultural economy’, so here is a brief outline of the local situation.

In December 2013 Waverley, Woollahra and Randwick Councils received a report by SGS Economics and Planning to guide and promote local economic development. Some ideas relevant to the Pavilion include the consultant’s explanation of economic horizons - where the first two build on the current customer base while the third horizon is *“reinventing... competencies, skills and endowments which underpin current activities”*. Also the ‘aging strategies’ that recommend *“education and learning opportunities so that they can continue to be engaged, be involved within the community”*, and the global trend of *“the rising demand for experiences over products and the rising importance of social relationships.”*

The current scheme to redesign the Bondi Pavilion offers no distinctive vision of Bondi – the beach and the bay are just “the view” – from a dining table or function room. Unfortunately there is some truth that the natural attractions are all Bondi offers. The review of the three municipalities of Sydney’s eastern suburbs by SGS shows there is not a single significant cultural destination – they list the Bondi Markets, Ritz Cinema, Sydney Cricket Ground and (now defunct) Marine Discovery Centre as the major ‘visitor attractions’.

The ‘cultural economy’ has far more diverse multiplying economic and social effects than the ‘catering economy’. The SGS review estimates the visitor expenditure at Bondi Beach to be \$90 million (in 2012 dollars), second only to Bondi Junction’s \$135 million, while Coogee is third with \$37 million. Apart from accommodation, food and the view, what are we providing our visitors?

A Centre for Coastal Culture at Bondi Pavilion may be one of the answers, and on the pavement, facing the beach of this reimagined Pavilion, could be the words of Isaac Newton (1642 – 1726), reflecting on his life of scientific inquiry and curiosity:

“To myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”

We ask the Inquiry to support the establishment of a ‘museum of coastal culture’ at the Bondi Pavilion as an educational leader and world-wide cultural attraction.

We would be happy to address the inquiry in person.

Yours sincerely,

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Cultural advisor
Save Bondi Pavilion group

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12 August 2016.

National Heritage listing - Commonwealth Gazette 25 January 2008

Criterion	Values
(a) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history.	<p data-bbox="453 846 1353 1115">Bondi Beach is significant in the course of Australia's cultural history as the site of the foundation of Australia's first recognised surf lifesaving club in 1907. From Bondi the surf lifesaving movement spread initially through NSW, subsequently to the rest of Australia, and then to the world. Along with the 'digger' and the 'bushman', the lifesaver has achieved an iconic place in Australia's cultural imagery. The lifesaver grew to become an accepted feature of the beach and a symbol of what was seen to be good about being Australian.</p> <p data-bbox="453 1133 1353 1397">From its inception, Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) has remained a voluntary organisation and a significant contributor to a well-established tradition of volunteering in Australia. Today SLSA is Australia's largest volunteer water safety organisation, with a national membership in 2006 of 120,000 members representing 305 clubs (SLSA 2007). Surf lifesavers have rescued more than 520,000 people in the 80 years since records have been kept, with the number of rescues each season in recent years fluctuating between 8,000 and 12,000.</p>

(g) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

Bondi Beach is significant because of its special associations for Australians, having a central place in the development of beach culture in Australia. Bondi Beach is one of the world's most famous beaches. With its golden sands, parks, and blue waters framed within rocky headlands, it has come to be seen both nationally and internationally as part of the Australian way of life and leisure. It is where Australians meet nature's challenge in the surf and is strongly associated with the Bronzed Aussie myth of easygoing hedonism and endeavour balanced with relaxation.

The beach and the surf lifesaving movement established at Bondi Beach facilitated a movement away from the restrictive attitudes of 19th century morality and the beach became the source of acceptable healthy pleasure. During the Depression the Australian notion of beaches as egalitarian playgrounds took root and Bondi, with its strongly working-class constituency, became the epitome of that idea.

The developing beach culture reinforced an already strong myth of Australian egalitarianism, of a nation where 'a fair go' was available to all. The Bondi Icebergs contributed strongly to this development. To many in Sydney they were seen as inheritors of the Anzac spirit – fun-loving larrikins not taking themselves too seriously, while still displaying the essential 'Aussie' characteristics of a fair-go, generosity, and mateship. Egalitarian in nature, the beach and surfing had a profound effect in changing our way of life, and developing our sense of national identity.

The central role of beaches, and Bondi Beach in particular, in Australia's self image is reflected in the use of the beach by painters, filmmakers, poets and writers in exploring this new self image and reflecting it back to Australian society. Bondi has played a central role in this process, and has come to be viewed both within Australia and internationally as the quintessential Australian beach.

Bondi Beach, Bondi Park and the headland reserves, the Bondi Surf Pavilion, the Bondi Surf Bathers Life Saving Club and North Bondi Surf Lifesaving clubhouse, and the Bondi Pool area and Icebergs building, together constitute an iconic place that is emblematic of the Australian beach experience