

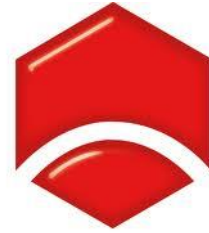
**Submission  
No 108**

## **INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES**

**Organisation:** Engineers Australia

**Date received:** 13 August 2016

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ENGINEERS  
AUSTRALIA

## Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into museums and galleries (August 2016)

Engineers Australia represents over 100,000 professional engineers and believes that it is vital that our society honours and is inspired by the contribution of previous generations of Australians.

In particular we are committed to preserving the knowledge of technology – how it was designed, how it was used and the contribution it has made to local communities.

Please find below comments from Engineering Heritage Australia (Engineers Australia's peak heritage body) relating to the stated terms of reference of the inquiry. Please also note that a separate and more detailed submission has been made by our Sydney Division heritage group.

### Specific terms of reference

- 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**
  1. *Currently the vast majority of NSW's engineering and technological heritage is held in community museums and collectors' organisations*
  2. *Engineering and technology heritage has very often been neglected by the large public institutions and we are indebted to the smaller, regional and specialist organisations for preserving this heritage.*
  3. *It is vital that all organisations have access to adequate funding such as specific grants dependent on the museums and organisations meeting appropriate standards for governance, operational management and long-term viability*
  4. *Funding should be granted based on the sound management of the collections and the submission of professional business cases*
- b) **potential funding impacts on museums and galleries affected by council amalgamations**
  1. *Recent council amalgamations must not be allowed to affect the long-term viability of community museums and organisations.*
    - i. *There must be no reduction in resources available to community organisations*
    - ii. *A key value of the community museums is their close relationship to their volunteer members and the local community. This must not be damaged by a drive to amalgamate facilities and introduce "shared services".*

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

1. *The wide distribution of technology collections offers many opportunities.*
  - i. *Maintaining many smaller museums and organisations retains the objects in their historical context and significance.*
  - ii. *Provides access for volunteers to care for the objects*
  - iii. *Provides ownership and pride for the items*
  - iv. *Supports local communities*
2. *This wide distribution also creates challenges. It is vital to support this focussed passion.*
  - i. *All technology collections must have access to high quality curatorial, managerial and marketing support and training without being unreasonably constrained by bureaucracy. These organisations have succeeded with little support until now. They need assistance, not over-zealous bureaucracy.*
3. *It is reasonable to expect higher standards of governance and management in return for higher levels of support*

**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**

1. *The current Powerhouse Museum and its associated Discovery Centre at Castle Hill provide acceptable access to the current science & technology collections.*
2. *The science & technology collections will benefit from being separated from the social history and decorative arts & design collections so that each can become more focussed.*
3. *The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences must continue to maintain the highest standards of technical, curatorial and technology management knowledge to be a "Centre of Excellence" for technological heritage and pass that knowledge on to the wider museum and collector community.*
4. *There must be a realistic acquisition programme for items of applied science and technology. The science and technology acquisition programme over many years has been inadequate and the collection, especially large items, now does not adequately represent technology since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

**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**

1. *We see no need to move the Powerhouse Museum. The current location is ideal for the display of iconic and state significant objects to state, national and international visitors.*
2. *The money involved in re-locating the MAAS would be better spent on new acquisitions, interpretation, revitalising the current site and/or providing more support to regional museums.*
3. *Museums deserve reasonable recurring funding, not funding through sale of their assets.*
4. *The current Powerhouse Museum buildings are a good example of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial architecture and an example of Sydney's former role as an industrial centre. Regardless of the future location of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences the historically significant components of the current Powerhouse Museum buildings must be retained.*

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

1. *There is currently little confidence that government decisions are being made in the interests of museum operators or visitors.*
2. *The community is entitled to know how decisions are made and if museum assets are coveted by external parties*

**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**

1. *The people of NSW expect that museums and galleries will be well managed and have plans for preservation of knowledge and artefacts for future generations*
2. *If museums and galleries are to become more efficient they must also be given access to training and capital investment in order to attain the productivity benefits. Arbitrary "efficiency dividends" are senseless.*
3. *The community museums and organisations could serve as a model for efficient restoration and presentation of technology objects. They have achieved much with few monetary resources.*

**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**

1. *Europe has pioneered the concept of industrial heritage tourism through the European Route of Industrial Heritage. A similar concept should be developed for NSW given the incredibly rich industrial heritage (much of international significance) remaining in Australia.*
2. *Technology tourism is more developed in Victoria. Two examples are the world renowned Puffing Billy and the Lake Goldsmith Steam Rallies held regularly 50km from Ballarat which typically attract over 15,000 visitors from all parts of Australia and overseas.*
3. *Museums deliver benefits beyond cultural tourism such as local community involvement (eg. Volunteers), preservation of specialised trades and skills, ability to train new generations in heritage trades and skills*

**i) any other related matter**

1. *By world standards, Australia has a very rich technological heritage collection which must be preserved for future generations.*
2. *We strongly support the introduction of a scheme similar to the UK Heritage Lottery Fund to support well planned conservation programmes. Such a scheme would need to be administered to ensure fair access to all organisations, not only a few influential organisations. This may be implemented by the Commonwealth or State government.*
3. *Australia is currently closing its manufacturing industries. This generation is likely to be the last to experience large-scale industrial employment or use manufactured items "Made in Australia". It is vital that the knowledge of this stage in Australia's development is preserved by preserving representative examples of industrial sites, machinery, manufactured products, archives (eg. documents, photographs, etc.) and personal experiences (eg. Oral histories)*
4. *For many examples of engineering and industrial heritage (such as machinery of all types) it is necessary to exhibit these items in working condition in order to demonstrate their true significance. Money and expertise must be made available to achieve this.*
5. *There has been a trend in recent years to turn the state sponsored technology museums into entertainment centres aimed primarily at children. It is our opinion that this trend has gone too far and the role of preserving knowledge of past and present technologies (from fundamentals to operating examples) needs to receive more emphasis. This will also require an increase in museum staff with specialist technical skills in addition to generic museum skills.*

Neil Hogg  
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