

**Submission
No 56**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Organisation: Arts Mid North Coast

Date received: 18 August 2016

Inquiry into NSW Museums & Galleries

Submission A

Arts Mid North Coast wishes to make the following submission in relation to the matters detailed in the terms of reference as:

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

Background

Arts Mid North Coast is the peak regional body for arts and cultural development across the Mid North Coast region of New South Wales, a region of 305,000 residents in the six local government areas of Mid Coast, Port Macquarie Hastings, Kempsey, Nambucca, Bellingen and Coffs Harbour. It embraces the Woromi, Biripi, Dunghutti and Gumbaynggirr Nations. We are part of the network of 14 Regional Arts Development Organisations in regional New South Wales providing considerable experience in strategic planning processes in regional areas. In this we work closely with all galleries and museums in the area and with regional organisations such as the Mid North Coast Chapter of Museums Australia.

We take a very expansive view of what is local culture preferring the broader definition based on the definition of cultural tourism of the World Tourism Organisation. Our definition is culture

... embraces a portfolio of information, experiences and activities that people can undertake to understand what makes a place distinctive. It provides everyone (residents and visitors) with an opportunity to understand the essential character and culture of a place: its spirit, identity, heritage, values, diversity, traditions and sense of place... These activities need to be authentic, informed quality cultural experiences to successfully interpret what is unique and special about a place.

As such we incorporate heritage and museums in all our work even though at a State level such matters fall between Arts NSW and NSW Environment and Heritage. Our expansive view also means that museums and galleries at a local level can be different models of traditional perceptions with these local community initiatives often creating models that reflect their needs and resources rather than Sydney centric concepts. Nevertheless no matter what their form what is indisputable is the contribution they make to our community across not only cultural but social and economic outcomes and benefits. It is therefore with delight we are able to make submissions on this important topic and present a regional perspective.

Our perspective reflects our local context which can be summarised as:

- Our museums are primarily community museums. We have 28 museums in the region and only one, Coffs Harbour has paid staff (1 position). However the others have hundreds of passionate and committed volunteers.
- Within the community museums sector there is a wide range of skills and commitment to professional standards. A number have excellent relationships with Museums & Galleries NSW and access their professional training opportunities. Those that do also tend to be more open to working collaboratively with positive outcomes such as the success of the Our Rivers our History project in 2015 where we were fortunate to partner with seven community museums. The project won a 2015 NSW IMAGinE Award and a 2016 MAGNA Award.
- We have three Regional Galleries in the region (Manning, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour). These all have established excellent programs and reputations. They all receive support from their local Council although in recent times budgets and staffing have either been stable or reduced. These galleries also are able to access a broader range of funding opportunities through State and Federal Arts grant programs and benefit from Councils increasingly employing staff for grant writing.
- Only one other Gallery in the region, Gloucester, has paid staff (1 member 2 days a week), a result of several years of successful grants from Arts NSW. However that funding was not received in the current year and the Gallery is having to look to other sources or reconsider the position.
- All other galleries are either community based or a very positive sign commercial galleries. Each of these types has very different needs and our submission focuses on community galleries
- From the perspective of our artists there is a concern that the major regional galleries do not exhibit local artists as much as they could and also have very long lead times in planning their exhibitions and cannot respond quickly to community aspirations. There are reasons for this and a positive is that new initiatives and models have developed to meet the needs of our artists. However should more public funding be put into regional galleries or gallery support a criteria or requirement relating to access for local artists will need to be considered.

Future Directions

Our focus in this submission is primarily on museums for they are the keepers of our rich heritage and have incredible potential to tell our stories. Community galleries play a very important part in showcasing local artists but generally are less likely to have a collection. Nevertheless many of the comments as to infrastructure and training apply equally to galleries in smaller regional communities.

Overall Directions Sought:

- Maintain and increase the funding and services of Museums & Galleries NSW for regional services
- Improve the poor standard of cultural facilities in community museums and galleries including better storage and the development of temporary exhibition spaces. The latter should include innovative ways of using spaces differently e.g. popup galleries.

- Encourage local government investment in museums and collections, and storytelling around distinctive themes, places and histories in rural and regional communities
- Encourage the employment of trained curators in rural and regional NSW, which is hard to achieve in current environment where councils don't want to take on new positions or responsibilities. Positions could be shared across Councils or be an expansion of the Museums Advisors and/or Heritage Advisors programs.
- Support the development of multipurpose cultural facilities in small rural communities to include potentially museums, archives, library, tourism, art and craft groups and other appropriate facilities
- Foster collaboration and regional networks so museums and galleries learn from each other and work together on collection, tourism and audience development projects
- Provide incentives for local government to plan for and support networks of community museums in their LGA
- Share distinctive local stories and collections on line in initiatives aimed at supporting exploration of museums and heritage places, discovery of local stories and encouraging schools to use local museums and collections

Capital Grants

- Provide for dedicated capital grants to local government for small rural communities to plan/ build multipurpose cultural facilities. Priority given to the projects that rehouse museums and collections in high quality facilities, and that include a multi-use exhibition space for changing local displays, and to take small scale travelling exhibitions and shows.
- Capital grants to larger local councils for the development of new museums /galleries in cultural precincts. Such precincts should be consistent with policies in *Create in NSW 2015* and its policies on cultural precincts and creative hubs. Where the building is for museum purposes it should be a requirement that any such regional museum includes a plan to work with community museums and collections throughout the LGA. Grants would be conditional on the employment by the Council of paid trained museum professionals early in the project development, and other criteria.

Not Just Buildings

- Provide funding for Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) and site masterplans for museums in heritage buildings, with follow up funding for conservation and new works
- Provide capital grants to help museums design and build new storage and archives, to cover firstly collection assessment and deaccessioning (or decluttering), scope, design and cost new space/facility, and build.
- Collections networking grants to engage museum professionals to work with regional networks of museums on important collection themes and local stories, along the lines of *Our Rivers Our History* <http://www.oroh.com.au/>
- Incentives to newly amalgamated councils in regional NSW to prepare an integrated strategic plan for all the museums in their new LGA, with additional funding once the plan is adopted in council's community plan and forward budget.

Exhibitions

A number of community museums have tired and old exhibitions that have not changed much in decades. Many do not see their product from the point of view of the visitors coming fresh to a town and wondering why it's where it is. Grants should be available which would allow community museums to engage a professional curator and exhibition designer to help them plan and produce new exhibitions that are focussed on interpreting the distinctive stories of their village, town or locality, encouraging visitors to explore the region. The grant could be in two stages depending on the museum, year one to develop a new exhibition plan for renew the museum's exhibitions, and year 2, to design and develop a new orientation exhibition about the place and its local stories. This would raise the standard of presentation in the museums and give volunteers the experience of working with professional design and curatorial skills. Three or four grants per annum would make a big difference.

Education

Funding for museums and galleries to engage qualified education specialists to develop curriculum linked education materials for use by local schools, based around objects and stories in the collection, and to work with schools and museums on developing digital stories from the collections, where the students are the content producers.

Training

Based on success in our region we would argue that new regional museum networks be created as the base for training and development. The museum networks would meet regularly for training and planning and be encouraged to develop collaborative projects. The networks could be supported with small \$10,000 pa grants paid to suitable community museums to act as the anchor and co-ordinator. The funding could cover some funding to host and pay for training and workshops and planning events, and to engage experienced people to help them with grant applications. The networks could be affiliated with regional arts boards and / or grow from the Museums Australia chapter network.

The Value of Culture

- Funding for a third stage of the MGNSW visitor studies *Guess Who's going to the Museum/Gallery*, to look only at visitors to regional venues. This would give the sector more knowledge about why visitors are coming and their interests, support advocacy for the tourism role of community venues and help tailor new displays, programs and interpretation to visitor interests.
- Consideration of a targeted study to value a number of community museum collections to assist understanding of the asset value of the collections held in community museums, and make the case for investment in maintenance of these assets. Collection valuations have been important levers for conservation funding for state museum collections and in advocacy for regional galleries. Communities and councils have little understanding of the value and significance of museum collections. Some sample collection valuations would draw attention to the importance of these collections and the need for investment.
- Develop a single portal for NSW collections and stories, along the lines of what Victoria has done. <http://www.cv.vic.gov.au/> <https://victoriancollections.net.au/>

Submission B

Arts Mid North Coast also wishes to make a submission in strong support of the following aspect of the terms of reference:

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

We do so because the benefits from cultural tourism highlight the importance of museums and galleries to regional communities and therefore link to the need to consider the matters raised in Submission A to provide better support for these cultural institutions.

A more proactive approach will also support better integration between the Arts and Tourism processes, a process beginning to be recognised in Create in NSW 2015. However we would note that the recommendations of the equivalent State document, the Visitor Economy Plan, remains very Sydney centric in its assessment of the value of the arts and needs stronger policies and recommendations in relation to regional New South Wales.

We believe we are very well placed to comment on such matters as the most active Regional Arts Development Organisation in NSW the area of cultural tourism with proven outcomes across a number of projects. We have repositioned much of what we do by accepting that cultural tourism provides great opportunities for our artists to be active participants in the local economy with benefits to all. Our Executive Director, Kevin Williams describes this expanded role as:

“I compare it to the two sides of a coin. On the one side we now play a very active role showcasing all of the creative attractions, activities and events in the region while on the other side of the coin we now do much to enhance the capacity of all of those involved to be active participants in the tourism industry.

If asked why I simply refer not to the number of tourists but the fact that they spend nearly 10 million nights in the region, that is 10 million mornings we have the chance to capture what they might want to do that day and add to our wonderful nature based experiences with an understanding of our identity and culture”.

The Mid North Coast Experience

The Mid North Coast of NSW is a vibrant arts and cultural destination with many rich and creative experiences of increasing interest and value to the 5 million plus visitors to the region as well as our residents. From dazzling performance spaces to unique galleries, and numerous historic museums the diversity of experiences truly offers something for everyone.

Arts Mid North Coast (AMNC) provides an extensive range of services to foster all cultural tourism experiences and providers on the Mid North Coast and in so doing enhances the enjoyment and appreciation of those visitors who seek a greater understanding our culture and its importance to

the region. We do so by collectively SHOWCASING the region's cultural experiences in creative and innovative ways while at the same time ENHANCING the capacity and ability of the providers of those experiences so that individually they can further develop their products and role in the visitor economy. The focus of the showcasing is through collaboration with the resulting end product targeting the visitor, while the enhancing role assists operators and providers better deliver their individual products to visitors.

Showcasing Cultural Tourism

AMNC works to showcase the region's cultural tourism by coordinating all cultural experiences in a number of marketing strategies under the brand of *Mid North Coast...the Creative Coast*. This cooperative approach across a whole region is a free service benefiting all who deliver cultural experiences whether industry or community and includes:

- Our 13 Cultural Trails featuring 429 cultural experiences with links to another 300 events and the active promotion of these across a number of platforms to highlight the Mid North Coast as a vibrant and cultural destination. There is no other set of cultural trails so extensive other than those for the State of Victoria, including Melbourne.
<http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/cultural-trails/>
- Our designation and promotion of seven Creative Communities of the Mid North Coast that further brings to the attention of visitors unique and different destinations where culture is at the heart of vibrant communities offering much to the visitor.
- Our online Regional Events Calendar featuring more than 300 events a year to encourage visitors to explore and enjoy the best of the region's events.

Enhancing Cultural Tourism.

We deliver a range of services to improve the quality, value and extent of cultural experiences that will enhance our visitors experience and understanding of our cultural diversity and vibrancy. These target two levels of the industry:

- Our wide range of business, marketing and strategic services and support to operators who provide the region's cultural experiences to ensure they are more visitor-focused and better positioned to participate and contribute to the visitor economy.
- Specialised support and services provided to Councils, Chambers of Commerce and statutory bodies at all levels to enhance the capacity of the industry thereby maximising opportunities for diverse visitor experiences and destinations.

Economic Outcomes

Although we have a regional focus many of the services we deliver foster and benefit local economies and local businesses. A general assessment is outlined below noting that museums and galleries are an important part of this cultural environment and outcomes

Creative Communities. Our highlighting of smaller communities is not just about their cultural experiences but how those experiences and creativity create a special place to visit.

<http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/creative-communities/> Our support and promotion of them thereby benefit all businesses in those communities. Tourism is everybody's business! In 2015/16 we funded the addition of an arts & culture section to the mobile apps developed by the Chamber of Commerce for Bellingen and Dorrigo; provided funding for a tourism destination brochure for Kendall, funded a small film project on Stroud and advised the Gladstone Business Chamber on a local public art trail as a strategy for destination marketing.

A Broad View of the Arts. Because of our understanding of cultural tourism, our focus is on experiences rather than traditional perceptions of art and where it is found. Our Food & Art Trail recognises that many people today experience art and music at cafes rather than in galleries or performance spaces. These café owners equally recognise that by expanding the experiences they offer they will better position themselves as a destination. Wineries are also listed as a category for the same reason. Equally our Performance Trail not only features classical and traditional music but Live Music Venues and Pubs and Clubs. Our Written Word Trail showcases all specialist Bookshops and what characterises a holiday on the Mid North Coast more than sitting under a tree and reading a good book! This all embracing definition of culture engages and promotes more businesses benefiting both them and their local economies

Events. There is general recognition today of the economic benefits events can bring to a town or region. Various models of multiplier effect have become standard practice. Much of our work involves working with and promoting events. In the last year we have partnered (advice, funding etc.) with major regional events including SWIFF, Opera by The Lake and Wingham Akoostik Music Festival. We have promoted other major regional events including: Bellingen Writers Festival, Camp Creative, Festival of the Sun, Bellingen Music Festival and Coffs International Buskers Festival. However, our value is even greater for events in smaller towns and localities which we give a regional voice and audience to. Just some in small townships are the: Kendall National Violin Competition, Dorrigo Folk & Blues Festival, Coramba Chamber Music Festival, Pacific Palms Arts Festival and Art in the Vale.

Supporting Small Business. In addition to our tourism focused products, our website has other directories which generate economic benefits to local businesses. Our regional Directory of Teachers is the only one in NSW and covers Art, Dance, Music and Performance. It lists over 250 teachers, all of them small local businesses. In 2016 we added a Directory for Art Supplies which features all outlets in the region selling art supplies, framing, music and instruments, dancewear.

Case Studies

Port Macquarie Museum

Arts Mid North Coast through its Executive Director has been working with the Port Macquarie Museum over three years to implement the 63 recommendations of its Cultural tourism Plan adopted in 2014. This is thought to be the only such Plan for community museums in Australia. Despite the Museum being volunteer run with no recurrent funding from any level of government It has implemented most of the recommendations and in 2016 celebrated its 60th birthday with many milestones including:

- Visitor numbers increased 20.2% reversing a downward trend from previous years. Declining visitation is common across nearly all regional museums.
- A new contemporary logo, branding, website and brochure. *Port Macquarie Museum – Our Place Our Stories*
- Industry recognition winning the North Coast Tourism Award (Cultural Tourism) for the third year in a row gaining Hall of Fame status.
- New special events increasing visitation from 170 to 1024 in this category. Increases also in education visits
- A major commercial partnership for 10 years signed with Forestry NSW.


Our Rivers Our History

The word Museum often conjures up concepts of old, dusty and historic. The Cultural Tourism Plan made a number of recommendations as to greater use of technology especially digital technology in displays and exhibitions. The award winning Our Rivers Our History <http://www.oroh.com.au/> is such an example. This interactive website seeks to attract viewers online but also to use it to drive visitors to the museum and the region. The web based exhibition is supplemented by four River Tourism Trails and a printed brochure distributed not only to Visitor Information Centres and attractions and accommodation providers but to cruise operators, fishing and boating stores, and other places frequented by those visiting for water based adventure holidays. Operators are also using much of the content in their own on-board commentaries

Key Lessons from Success

The following key lessons can and should be applied to reform for museums and galleries in regional NSW.

- Importance of strong partnership between Regional Arts Development Organisations and local partners
- The Regional Arts Development Organisation Network provides a model which could be used as the catalyst for greater coordination and networking required in regions if a number of our funding recommendations are adopted. We would also note that such matters should be considered in final decisions made on Regional Joint Organisations.
- Port Macquarie Museums commitment to enhanced professional development for its volunteers and dedication to accessing and maximising grant opportunities highlights the importance of these matters across museums and galleries
- The value of collaboration and networking as evidenced by seven museums involved in the Our Rivers Our History
- The importance of stories in engaging both locals and visitors
- The importance of making history and museums relevant to today and to current tourism experiences.


Executive Director
Arts Mid North Coast