

INQUIRY INTO GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

Introduction:

Delegate is a small town near the NSW/Victorian border. It has a small ageing but stable population. The economic base of the town is farming and forestry but there is an increasing level of tourism in the area. The potential for tourism is strong as Delegate is the only town on the traditional aboriginal pathway the Bundian Way. This pathway from Eden to Kosciusko is being developed as an iconic walking, and four-wheel drive touring track. The road through Delegate to Orbost is also a popular route for motor cycle tourism.

The Delegate Progress Association was formed in the 1980s to act as an advocate for this small community. Since then it has been instrumental in developing three key projects in the town, two art galleries and one museum. These projects have provided popular tourist venues as well as recognising cultural and historical values within this small rural community. As well as the galleries the DPA also developed an Arts centre which provides a venue for workshops as well as resources for the use of local arts and craftspeople.

Impact of Council Amalgamations

Since the Council Amalgamation with Snowy Monaro Regional Council there is a very real risk that this isolated small community will be sidelined and that an already obvious bias towards the snow tourism of the other two council areas will overshadow the efforts of the previous Bombala council to highlight our unique local tourist attractions.

The local community had a very good working relationship with the Bombala Council and was supported in many ventures related to our town not the least of which was the Men From Snowy River Recruitment March re-enactment in late 2015 and January 2016 as part of the centenary of the first World War Commemorations. The Delegate Progress Association received an Outstanding Community Service award from the NSW member for Monaro, Mr John Barilaro for their commitment in organising these events. These events were made possible because of the extensive research available through our local History Museum and our close connections with the Australian War Memorial. Our patron was Dr Brendan Nelson.

So far we have not seen the same level of interest emanating from the new council in either our history, our cultural ties with the indigenous population or our own natural attractions such as the platypus and the stunning natural beauty of the cross-border southern Monaro landscape.

The Delegate Progress Association and its role in the galleries and museum

Bundian Way Art gallery and Borderline Gallery

The Bundian Way Gallery is the only gallery in the south-east dedicated to local indigenous art. The gallery was established in 2012 as part of the Bundian Way project and has been developed and maintained by the Delegate Progress Association in liaison with the Eden lands Council and South East Arts. The DPA has received no government funding for this. All maintenance, staffing and advertising is done by the volunteers in the DPA. We have overseen new exhibitions every three months since the gallery was officially opened in 2012. The gallery has attracted many visitors and tourists.

The Borderline Gallery was established in 2008 and showcases the talent of local artists and craftspeople. It was established with some funding from the local council but after the first few years it has been continued through the hard work of the same small band of volunteers. This gallery is very popular with tourists as the artwork is unique, competitively priced and local, with no made in China labels

The Delegate Museum

The same can be said for the small museum housed in the local School of Arts building. This museum has two rooms. The larger is dedicated to the local people who served in all theatres of war from the Boer War to the present conflicts. The other room is still being developed and is a local history room. This room will also feature indigenous history.

The galleries and the museum are very popular venues for visitors and bus tours.

Difficulties faced by the three venues.

- Without sufficient income generated by either sales, donations or small grants from non government organisations the DPA cannot afford to pay a regular employee to take over some of the administrative and curating tasks.
- There is a small group of volunteers who cover all of these responsibilities but there are problems associated with this. Volunteers only work for one day at a time and so there is little continuity and many problems with communication.
- Volunteers have varying levels of computer literacy so much of the administrative and advertising work is shouldered by an even smaller number of people eg We are currently upgrading our website an onerous and time consuming task which needs continuity.
- Most of our volunteers are 65years and older. They find the work increasingly tiring as the number of responsibilities increases.
- The three venues run at a loss but are kept afloat by the DPA which has a small income stream. The DPA cannot continue to fund these venues indefinitely especially when maintenance, insurance and utility costs are increasing.

- The potential of these galleries and museums and the increase in tourist interest in the area mean that the future is positive. However we can only benefit from this with significant injections of funds, something our small community cannot provide.

The Importance of significant Government support

Delegate is a small isolated rural community. In the last few decades it has seen changes in the economic foundation of the town and surrounding areas. Young people have been forced to seek employment in far off cities as there are no longer any small industries and farming is increasingly a one man affair. A family farm is a distant memory. Farmers are forced to sell to large conglomerates and good arable land has been turned over to pine forests as part of tax avoidance schemes for city based investors. None of these markers of a dubious progress have been sought by the local people.

A glimmer in this gloomy prognosis has been the development of a tourism industry based on a growing desire for urbanites to have a small taste of the true 'rural Australia'.

The Delegate community are proud of their heritage and willing to share their future with the indigenous community. The establishing of the two galleries and the museum are an indication of this.

The problem is that because of an urban centric mindset it is difficult for a small community of less than 400 residents to convince the materialistic city administrations that their small, sustainable and non-materialistic priorities can, given some assistance from government, create viable employment opportunities. It has been shown that a small grant to our community can create astounding results. One extra job opportunity especially to a young family can have far reaching ramifications in exactly the same way that the loss of one job can have devastating consequences.

Developing a sense of shared culture, a sense of continuity, and a sense of pride within a small community is essential to ensuring 'livability'. If the government could give the small community endorsement of its importance, recognition to the ageing population of the contribution that they have made in the past, and provide them with adequate services instead of dismissing their needs with the suggestion that they should move elsewhere, a vibrant community would be better able to move forward. A town with a future would retain its young people.

The volunteer groups in Delegate are the mainstay of our community. The galleries and museum are a clear indication of this. The funding structures of government need to better address the needs of isolated small rural communities. Small communities need to be involved in any processes which are supposedly addressing the problems of the rural demographic. In the past we have been unaware of funding opportunities for our galleries

and museum, this is an area that the inquiry should focus on ie making this sort of information available to every gallery or museum no matter how small or isolated is crucial to ensure equity in funding allocations.

We would like to see a genuine attempt by the state government to address the needs of small isolated rural communities. Our community has proven itself proactive in trying to maintain the viability of our community, our solutions are not those of the profit driven cities but we aim to maintain our heritage and culture and to ensure quality of life within our area.

We hope this inquiry will recognise that N.S.W. stands for more than **N**ewcastle, **S**ydney and **W**ollongong.