


Submission  
No 41

## INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

**Organisation:** Council of Australasian Museum Directors

**Date received:** 17 August 2016

---

	<p>COUNCIL OF AUSTRALASIAN MUSEUM DIRECTORS</p>	<p><b>NSW Legislative Council Parliamentary Inquiry into Museums and Galleries</b></p> <p><b><u>CAMD submission</u></b></p> <p><b>12 August 2016</b></p>
---	---	--

## INTRODUCTION

The Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD) welcomes the opportunity provided by the NSW Upper House Inquiry to comment on the value and impact of museums, galleries and heritage collections. CAMD does not involve itself in the management of individual member museums and has therefore deliberately chosen not to comment on the Powerhouse Museum relocation process with the exception that we would urge that any such move be accompanied by appropriate resourcing to ensure that this world-class institution is able to continue to fulfil its remit and potential in serving the people of NSW.

The following comments by CAMD deal with some, but not all, the terms of reference but with particular regard to the need for a more integrated, cross-portfolio approach to the development of museum policies and strategies in NSW.

## CAMD

CAMD brings together the Directors and CEOs of the major national, state/territory and regional museums in Australia and New Zealand. The museums represented include natural science and social history museums, science centres, industry, design and technology collections, combined museum/art galleries, heritage houses and outdoor museum sites in 63 locations across Australia and New Zealand.

Member museums in NSW include the Australian National Maritime Museum and the three state-funded museums: the Australian Museum, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences and Sydney Living Museums. A list of CAMD members and the museums represented is at attachment a and b provided with the submission.

### ***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***

The NSW Government directly funds three of Australia's most prestigious and well-respected museums and museum house networks. The Australian Museum is the oldest institution in Australia (1827), the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences follows (1879) and Sydney Living Museums, while established more recently, encompasses house museums and collections which go back to the earliest years of the first colony. Predating the national museums, and along with a large number of regional and local museums across the State, these institutions hold a significant part of the national cultural

and scientific heritage. They also represent a significant ongoing investment on the part of the State Government.

Over the last twenty years, museums have confronted head-on the challenges thrown up by mass entertainment, the online world, changing scientific knowledge and community needs. In particular, collecting institutions, both large and small, are considering a new paradigm for unlocking cultural heritage collections – one in which a two-way cultural conversation between museums and users is becoming paramount with the aid of digital technology advances.

To realise the full potential of museums, the State Government needs to ensure that:

- the government and museums have full knowledge of the shape and size of the museum sector (including major, regional and community institutions) in order to understand its full reach, impact and potential
- they support research and strategic planning on the role of museums and their relationships with their visitors – on the ground and online – and those who use museums for research
- a state-wide, cross-portfolio policy framework and strategy is developed which optimises the multifaceted roles played by museums in relation to culture, education, research, tourism and community
- museums are supported by State Government to enhance digital access and the use of digital technology in relation to museum collections
- appropriate funding, on a cyclical basis, is invested in museums and consideration given to rescinding the efficiency dividend in relation to cultural institutions.

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

**Reach and engagement**

CAMD has been surveying its members on an annual basis since 1990. A review of available data from the last five years (2010/11 – 2014/15) demonstrates that, in that period, the three NSW State museums referred to above:

- were visited over 9.3 million times by members of the Australian public and tourists<sup>1</sup>
- reached another million or more people through regional tours of exhibitions and programs
- presented formal education programs to over 1 million students on-site and through touring programs and video-conferencing and
- recorded a staggering 41.2 million online visits to their websites.

---

<sup>1</sup> The high level of interest in museums is often underrepresented as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has in the past prepared cultural involvement figures on the basis of telephone polls which rely on respondent memory and exclude children under 15 years of age and tourists. CAMD gathers figures via its annual member survey in which the majority of visits recorded are either ticketed or electronically recorded.

## **Communicating Collections**

At the heart of this deep interest in NSW State museums is the over 18 million natural science, cultural and geoscience specimens held by the Australian Museum and close to 800,000 cultural, heritage and technological objects held by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences and Sydney Living Museums which form a significant part of the distributed national collection.

The NSW collections and the uses to which they are put are dynamic - they are growing continuously as new material, from new species to fossils from our ancient past and from contemporary indigenous art to cutting edge forms of digital technology, are identified and collected. The collections are constantly 'mined' by museum staff and others for exhibitions, education content, public programs, online showcases, documentaries, research, art collaborations and other interactions which catalyse creativity, understanding and expression across a wide range of cultural fields.

Museums have a core role to communicate information drawn from the collections and associated research to the public through their exhibitions and programs on and off site and online. They are among the most trusted of Australia's institutions due to the knowledge implicit in their collections and the careful objectivity of the research infusing their exhibitions and public programs<sup>2</sup>. In their communications to the public they bring together a multitude of viewpoints on significant issues, interpret complex subjects, promote community understanding and engage users of all ages in the search for the past, an understanding of the present and to canvass future solutions to 'big issues' such as national identity and sustainability.

## **Research infrastructure and projects**

It is also important to stress that State museums are an integral part of the national research effort. The collections held by museums have long been recognised as part of our national research infrastructure; they are utilised by researchers around Australia and internationally. At the same time, museum staff also generate ground-breaking research in their own right, through research partnerships with universities and in collaboration with the private sector. Much of this research is in disciplines such as taxonomy which are not covered by other research facilities or in nationally and globally significant areas such as climate change, biosecurity, biodiversity, cultural identity and resource management. Over the last three years (2012/13 – 2014/5) the three State museums have undertaken close to 300 grant-funded research projects worth more than \$8.2m, made over 500 research presentations and produced over 511 scholarly publications.

## **Economic impact**

The State museums are also influential economic entities. In the 2014-15 period alone they received over \$83m in funding from Government, generated non-Government income (commercial and non-commercial) of \$32.6m, employed over 588 FTE staff and were assisted by over 1,800 volunteers.

On any available objective criteria – be it reach, collections, communication, research or economic

---

<sup>2</sup> Linda Kelly, [Museums as Sources of Information and Learning: The Decision Making Process](#), 2009

impact - it is clear that the State museums matter in terms of the cultural life of both the state and nation.

Much still needs to be done to gain a clearer picture of the impact, reach and needs of the State museums and also of the wider museum and gallery sector in NSW. The many small to medium museums in regional and remote Australia play an important role in preserving significant collections and local stories within their communities, encouraging cultural connectedness and contributing to local renewal via employment and regional tourism. However, support for them is ad hoc with small to medium collections competing for a declining pool of short term grants funding.

The ABS no longer carries out regular surveys of the museum industry and the statistical work undertaken under the aegis of the Meeting of Cultural Ministers is limited to a study of the national museums and institutions. There is a particular lack of qualitative studies about museums, their present uses and potential for the future. Research into the sector would contribute to innovation, collaboration and the development of a stable and sustainable base.

1. **CAMD recommendation:** that the State Government develop a ‘roadmap’ of the museum and gallery sector in NSW and that it identifies and provides support for further qualitative research into priority issues for the sector.

2. **CAMD recommendation:** that the State Government resource the major museums, Museums Galleries Australia and Museums and Galleries of NSW to provide additional advice, training and support to those caring for collections in regional and community museums.

***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***

**Physical access**

While the State museums attract dependably large numbers to view their permanent galleries and local shows and to special exhibitions, including blockbusters from overseas, there is still a number of ways in which even larger audiences, from a wider socio-economic base, could be encouraged. In this respect, it must be noted that NSW is one of only two States/Territories which charge the public for entry to their State museums. Although children under 16 are covered by the *Kids Free* initiative, the cost of entry for adults continues to be a deterrent. The success of the *Free Weekend* held at the Australian Museum and Powerhouse Museum in June this year, when almost 70,000 visitors braved the cold to visit their State museums, seems to be indicative of the appeal of free entry.

Free entry would be a game-changer which would see public visits to institutions such as the Australian Museum and Powerhouse Museum rise dramatically.

3. **CAMD recommendation:** that the NSW Government introduce free entry to NSW State museums.



## Digital access

Museums are able to physically exhibit only a small fraction of their extensive holdings at any one time. They are also limited by lack of resources and logistics from touring anything other than small, selected exhibitions from the collections to regions outside Sydney.

Over the last decade the State museums have embarked on long-term projects to digitise collections, develop online material for educational curricula and exploit opportunities for digital technology to enable new museum-user exchanges. The Australian Museum, for example, has a world leading digitisation program utilising over 1,500 volunteers to assist in making its collection accessible. The Digivol methodology has been adopted by 22 leading institutions internationally. The [Field Guide to Fauna](#) apps developed as an educational tool by CAMD museums in each state and territory, including NSW, have now been downloaded close to 197,000 times.

The value of digitising collection data lies in the critically useful information it unlocks. This information can and is being used to:

- create high quality, authoritative, Australian online content for primary and secondary students in ‘connected classrooms’ around the nation
- build a knowledge basis for interactive, high definition video conferences between students and experts from around the world
- develop digital story-telling projects and other creative art programs which use cultural collections as a jumping off point
- stage ‘virtual exhibitions’ which can reach even the most remote communities
- provide online inspiration for the next wave of Australian designers and innovators
- reconnect diaspora and creator communities with intangible and material heritage
- encourage opportunities for users to curate their own online collections
- inspire content for mobile applications and services and
- launch platforms and supporting information for ‘citizen scientists’ to contribute to research.

It is also noteworthy that the current National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) process has identified Australia’s national and state cultural collections and institutions as a ‘vital set of national research infrastructure to researchers’ and that ‘(m)aintenance, preservation and ready access to these collections is a key emerging concern to ensure that the use, value and potential of these national assets is maximised’.<sup>3</sup> This demand for scientific access is well illustrated by the online [Atlas of Living Australia](#) (ALA) to which the Australian Museum and many other museums of natural history contribute digital specimen records. By early 2014 the ALA had downloaded its billionth piece of data to researchers.

---

<sup>3</sup> See the Department of Education and Training, National Research Infrastructure Capability Issues Paper, July 2016, p.33

The NSW Government has recognised the importance of digital access by providing substantial funding to the State Library of NSW to digitise its newspaper collections but similar support has not been available to the museums. Far greater resourcing from the State Government is required to ensure that the significant collections of the Australian Museum and other museums in NSW are accessible to the public and the national and international research community.

CAMD is currently a partner, with a wide range of peak organisations from the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector, in a project to develop a national framework, strategies and standards to enhance digital access to cultural collections. Due to the resource intensive nature of putting collections online it is important that this process be approached systematically, on a national basis and in a way which allows prioritisation and collaboration to provide the most effective use of resources and tools to allow the user to explore and engage with the collections.

**4. CAMD Recommendation:** That the NSW State Government resource the State museums to digitise their collections and institute a planning framework which links to and complements the development of a national strategy for digital access to museum collections.

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

Museums are collectors, conservators, exhibitors, teaching and learning providers, research institutes, technological innovators, tourist ‘hot spots’, social centres and meeting places, sites of mass entertainment and social change facilitators. However, precisely because of the extraordinary breadth of their collections and functions, museums often ‘fall between the cracks’ of Government policy development.

**Structural challenges**

The first gap relates to the ways in which our federated system shares support for the distributed national collection across federal governments, state/territory bodies and local bodies. The larger part of the nation’s collections, which were created long before Federation, are in state/territory museums. Australia does not have a national natural science museum thus museums like the Australian Museum, which holds an historic and comprehensive natural science collection of specimens, fill this gap without Federal support. Similarly, Australia lacks a national collection relating to science, technology, engineering, mathematics and design; which is addressed in part by the collections of the Powerhouse Museum. These and other major state, territory and regional collections hold many items which are seen justifiably as **national** treasures but are resourced as part of the state’s remit.

**Touring National Treasures**

Another result of this structure is that the state/territory collections are not resourced by their state governments to tour or collaborate across state/territory boundaries. Nor are they supported by the Federal Government to ensure Australia-wide access. Some are able to access federal funding programs, including the Federal Government’s excellent *Visions of Australia* program for interstate touring, but the long lead times and high cost of touring three-dimensional objects makes this difficult

for many. CAMD, [Museums Galleries Australia](#) and other related peak collection organisations collaborate regularly but there is a clear need to look at new ways to sustain, promote and utilise cultural collections, large and small, city and regional, across Australia in order for the full benefit of Government investment in this sector to be realised.

### **Falling between portfolios**

Policy for the major museums is also managed by a wide range of portfolios. The Australian Museum and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences work alongside Arts NSW within the Department of Justice while Sydney Living Museums is part of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage within the NSW Department of Planning and Environment. Museums face a constant challenge to link with potential collaborators in other portfolios. At the same time, their activities are often viewed as an uncomfortable 'fit' when policy is made for the 'arts'.

**5. CAMD recommendation:** That the NSW State Government develop a more strategic approach by encouraging mechanisms or a framework which link museum policy development and its application across relevant portfolios such as arts, heritage, education, science, tourism and state development.

**6. CAMD recommendation:** That the NSW State Government actively seek to develop a similar cross-portfolio approach through Standing Committees and the Meeting of Cultural Ministers at the federal level.

### ***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***

CAMD believes that the application of the efficiency dividend to cultural institutions, including museums, is inappropriate as it fails to take into account the special budgetary and financial constraints experienced by museums. The cumulative impact of this impost is seen in key areas such as staff losses. Between 2010-11 and 2014-15 the aggregated FTE staffing numbers at the Australian Museum, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences and Sydney Living Museum decreased from 704 positions to 588 – a decline of over 16%. The impact of the dividend is also discerned in declining visitor numbers, an inability to move ahead with digitisation and education programs and a decline in access for regional and online visitors.

The efficiency dividend is a blunt instrument which enables governments and departments to avoid making funding decisions about specific programs and activities. A more detailed review of funding decisions might in fact see some programs dropped and others receive increased resources because they achieve better outcomes, including economic results, long term. While museums have worked hard to find new funding from sources other than appropriation, there is a limit to how much work can be undertaken seeking additional funds before it impacts on museum core roles.

**7. CAMD Recommendation:** that the NSW government remove the inefficient and inequitable efficiency dividend from cultural institutions including museums.



**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***

NSW museums are multi-million dollar businesses serving the public benefit; they bring excitement and interest as well as jobs and substantial spending power to their local communities. Museum sites themselves, which are often historic in nature, enhance civic pride and encourage urban and rural regeneration. They add to the sense of Sydney as a world city and offer the tourist insight into the natural and cultural life of the state and nation.

Museums stimulate tourism by offering an exhilarating calendar of exhibitions from Australia and overseas. The Australian Museum attracted over 200,000 visitors to the *Tyrannosaurs: Meet the Family* exhibition in 2013-14 and 160,000 to *Alexander the Great*; recently the Powerhouse Museum drew close to 110,000 to *Jewellery in Australia*. Domestic and interstate tourists generally account for around 37% of all visitors to the Australian Museum, 30% to the Powerhouse Museum and 22% to the many sites of Sydney Living Museums.

While relatively few reports have been done on the economic role of museums, where these figures exist, it can be seen that successful attractions, for example exhibitions at the Powerhouse, have attracted over 70,000 tourists to Sydney who spent 260,000 additional bed nights in NSW and generated \$46.9 million in economic impact for the NSW economy. Museums and Galleries of NSW have also identified this positive economic impact in their 2014 [Adding Value](#) study of museums and galleries in regional areas.

Sydney's major museums, however, must compete with cultural institutions in other capital cities and overseas to attract high calibre exhibitions which, when part of a State-wide strategic marketing exercise, bring impressive attendances including tourists from regional NSW, interstate and overseas. The success of the [Melbourne Winter Masterpieces](#) campaign, which has attracted 5 million visitors since its inception in 2004, is a case in point. To succeed in this market, the museums also have to provide the optimum conditions eg the Australian Museum at present only has 6,500 square metres while the Melbourne Museum has close to 30,000 square metres of temporary exhibition space.

In their *2009 Snapshots: Cultural and Heritage Tourism in Australia*, Tourism Research Australia reported that the two most popular activities undertaken by tourists (both international and domestic) were "visiting heritage buildings sites and monuments" and "visiting museums and art galleries". These types of tourists accounted for more than 150 million visitor nights in Australia each year and contributed strongly to regional economic growth and employment opportunities. Despite these opportunities, little seems to have been done on a cross-portfolio base to capitalise on this obvious strength, to support museums to be 'China Ready' and/or to develop marketing strategies for cultural tourism generally.

**8. CAMD recommendation:** that the NSW State Government build cross-portfolio cultural tourism strategies which take advantage of and build on the attraction of museums to the domestic and overseas cultural tourist.

If further information is required about the issues covered in this submission please feel free to contact CAMD using the details supplied below.

*Dr Meredith Foley*  
*CAMD Executive Officer*

[www.camd.org.au](http://www.camd.org.au)