

**Submission
No 66**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Organisation: Trustees of the Historic House Trust

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Inquiry into Museums and Galleries –

Submission on behalf of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales

1 Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales

This submission is made on behalf of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales (HHT) which operates under the name Sydney Living Museums (SLM). HHT is an NSW State Corporation established under the Historic Houses Act 1980 (NSW) to control, manage, and conserve the historic buildings and places vested in it and to provide educational, cultural, research and other professional services in relation to those properties and the collections associated with them.

Unlike other NSW State Museums and Galleries which are located within the Department of Justice, SLM is administered through the Office of Environment and Heritage in the Department of Planning and Environment.

SLM is Australia's leading place-based institution and one of Australia's largest State museum bodies. Over the past 35 years, the institution has grown from a small organisation into one of the State's major heritage and cultural institutions, managing and conserving 12 sites of national and state historical and cultural importance. These sites are located in the central business district of Sydney, Western Sydney and in regional New South Wales. One of SLM's sites, the Hyde Park Barracks, is a UNESCO world heritage site.

Further information concerning SLM, including copies of its most recently available annual reports, can be accessed via this link - <http://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/>

The activities of SLM are overseen by a Board of Trustees appointed under the HHT Act. The day-to-day operations of SLM are led by an Executive Director who reports to the Board of Trustees and the CEO of the Office of Environment and Heritage. SLM employs 175 FTE staff and receives support from 175 regular volunteers and up to 300 additional volunteers who assist with specific programs.

Total visitation at SLM Museums and properties during 2015/16 was 1.012 million people. In recent years, SLM has achieved both an increase in public visitation and an increase in admission revenue, due to successful programming and new institutional branding.

Through its education programs, SLM reached more than 61,000 students in 2015. Of these, approximately 59,600 visit SLM's properties and a further 1500 participate in our on-line education programs. Our groundbreaking Unlocking Heritage program provided tailored programs for students from 30 schools in low socio-economic, rural and regional areas. These programs were delivered in partnership with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

In addition to exhibitions at its properties, SLM organises touring exhibitions which visit cities and towns in regional New South Wales and other centres around Australia. In 2015, more than 280,000 people attended SLM's five touring exhibitions, at regional museums and galleries in 11 centres in NSW.

2 Opportunities to revitalise the structure, reach and impact of museums and galleries and their collecting priorities

SLM's strategy is to maximise the reach and impact of its properties, collections and exhibitions. SLM's success in doing so is reflected in strong visitation numbers and in awards received for our exhibitions.

SLM's research and collection priorities are determined not only by reference to our exhibitions but also by our statutory obligations to conserve historic properties. This involves considerable research in areas such as indigenous and colonial history, architecture, heritage conservation, traditional building skills and decorative arts. SLM is seen as a centre for excellence in these areas and a leading publisher on these and other topics. SLM's Caroline Simpson Library and Research Collection, located at the Mint, is seen as the leading collection focused on Australian homes, interiors and gardens and is regarded as a leading research library and collection in heritage and conservation circles.

SLM is always looking for opportunities to extend its reach and impact. Some of these opportunities are available through collaboration between institutions while others require a commitment to ongoing investment in research, professional staff and museum infrastructure.

3 Access to the collections of other museums and state collections

SLM has a long history of collaboration with other cultural institutions in New South Wales, including the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Australian Museum, the National Maritime Museum, the State Library of NSW, the Royal Botanic Garden, NPWS and various other State departments, archives and collections. Given the nature of SLM's own collections, this level of collaboration is essential to maintain the breadth, quality and vibrancy of SLM's exhibitions.

SLM welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with other cultural institutions and state entities in order to ensure wide public access to state collections. This collaboration often goes beyond merely sharing collections and has involved many shared programs between SLM and other institutions. These create an understanding for visitors in the overarching narrative of Sydney and New South Wales. SLM believes there is significant opportunity for further collaboration between institutions but notes that making more of the State's collections available to the public will require continued investment in both cultural infrastructure and digitisation.

4 Development of advice to Government on priorities for New South Wales Museums and Galleries

SLM has been an active participant in discussions between the Government and leading cultural institutions on the development of the State's cultural policies and cultural Infrastructure policy. SLM welcomes the opportunity to continue its involvement in these discussions.

SLM notes that much of the work undertaken in determining priorities for New South Wales museums and galleries is undertaken by the Department of Justice which has responsibility for Arts and Culture. Like SLM many of the State's important cultural institutions and collections sit outside the Department of Justice and it is important to ensure that a "whole of Government" approach is taken to planning and prioritisation. Otherwise, there is a risk that priorities will be too narrowly focused and opportunities for great efficiency, activation and public access will be missed.

5 The impact of the Efficiency Dividend on the budgets of museums and galleries

SLM acknowledges that it is important for cultural institutions to operate efficiently and effectively. It acknowledges that the efficiency dividend has provided a incentive to institutions to improve

efficiency and performance and to maximise their non-government income. SLM believes that a continued focus on efficiency is essential for the long term health and competitiveness of the State's cultural and heritage institutions.

However, the way in which the efficiency dividend operates also has a number of negative and unintended consequences. In SLM's case, the need to meet the efficiency dividend over the last 10 years has constrained investment that would have, over time, allowed SLM to build its revenue base and reduce its need for State funding. This constraint on investment also inhibits investments which would extend the reach and impact of SLM's programs and exhibitions.

The efficiency dividend also tends to focus institutional attention on a narrow set of financial KPIs and, by doing so, it inhibits appropriate risk taking and innovation. This risk taking and innovation by cultural and heritage institutions is essential to a vibrant and competitive cultural sector.

In summary, efficiency and effectiveness are desirable and necessary attributes for the State's cultural and heritage institutions. However, consideration should be given to ways in which the operation of the efficiency dividend might be ameliorated so as to ensure that it does not inhibit necessary investment and innovation or undermine excellence.

6 The impact of museums and galleries on cultural tourism and their role supporting the visitor economy in Sydney and regional New South Wales

The economic impact of museums and galleries on cultural tourism and the visitor economy in Sydney and New South Wales has been well documented in a number of reports in recent years. SLM notes that cultural and heritage tourism generated \$1.2 billion for the State in 2015.

SLM submits that the economic impact of museums and galleries goes well beyond their contribution to cultural tourism and the visitor economy. Australia and international research demonstrates conclusively that a city's cultural offering is critical in attracting creative industries and investment and the kinds of talented people needed to drive a creative and knowledge based economy. In the circumstances, the continued vibrancy and global competitiveness of the State's cultural institutions is essential to its global competitiveness and Sydney's position as a global city.

In addition to their economic impact, the State's museums and galleries have a significant impact on the education, entertainment and urban environments enjoyed by the State's citizens. The State's major cultural institutions occupy important public buildings that have the capacity to influence their surrounding precincts in significant ways. This is particularly so for SLM given the number of properties it is responsible for and their distribution.

SLM believes that there is scope for it and other cultural institutions to play a more significant role in place making and the development of vibrant precincts in Sydney and elsewhere throughout the state.

7 Other issues – global competitiveness and benchmarking

SLM works hard to keep itself informed of major national and international trends in heritage, culture, conservation and museums. In particular, SLM encourages its senior staff to stay up to date with global trends in museum design, curatorial practice, digitisation, fundraising and marketing. Through this process, SLM is also aware of the significant investment in cultural and heritage infrastructure being made by governments and cities around the world.

As noted above, cultural institutions play a key part in the global competition for creative industries, investment and talent. They also compete for cultural tourism. In the circumstances, it is essential that the State's cultural institutions are globally and nationally competitive. Maintaining this competitiveness should involve rigorous international benchmarking to inform

decisions about investment and cultural infrastructure, digitisation and skills development. SLM undertakes this benchmarking as a matter of course and understand that many other institutions do the same. However, more can be done to ensure that this kind of benchmarking informs the State's arts and cultural policy and investment decisions for the future.

The Trustees of SLM thank the Standing Committee for the opportunity to make this submission. We would be happy to expand on any aspect of it if requested.

Michael Rose

Chairman