

**Submission
No 160**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 4

Inquiry into museums and galleries

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 financial support of all levels of government is paramount to the efficiency, stability and growth of regional cultural institutions. The Livability Index for regional areas includes a full range of the expectation of all residents (not to mention visitors) for cultural, sporting, business and leisure facilities.

- Cultural institutions in regional areas should expect to be funded to a reasonable level for staffing, programs and infrastructure. A number of local government authorities (Coffs Harbour City Council, Broken Hill City Council and Newcastle City Council to identify three culprits) have begun to downgrade staffing levels and diminish qualifications by installing overarching “managers” for their cultural facilities. This practice has begun to demoralize qualified staff with higher degrees and reduce opportunities for a once assured career path. Where subsequent staff are appointed the essential and desirable criteria are lowered and thus no right-minded qualified candidate will bother applying their skills to underfunded and downgraded jobs.

- Many regional areas rely in part for tourism revenue to sustain their local economies. With properly funded and resourced cultural facilities. In not ensuring a good level of financial support the capacity for these regional cultural institutions to provide a regional and local experience for visitors will be eroded and ultimately be detrimental to the local and regional tourism industries.

- In terms of infrastructure all regional galleries, and museums where required, should have adequate exhibition space and display resources including dimmable lighting/hanging system/display cases/audio visual capability, a loading dock with handling equipment, a climate controlled storage area for holding touring exhibitions and their crates, a preparation area, and dedicated space for arts workshops/classes.

b) potential funding impacts on museums and galleries affected by council amalgamations

- Council amalgamations in many areas will be looking carefully for opportunities to cut costs. Be fearful of the results for cultural institutions such as regional galleries and museums. Volunteer museums rely largely on the support and goodwill of local residents. They are the repositories for local history and without them much of what we understand about our local history would be lost or not readily available.

- Museums and Galleries NSW was established to provide a degree of support to both regional galleries and volunteer run museums. Recently they have suffered major funding cuts reducing their core capacity as a regional service organisation to adequately provide a high level of service, particularly in training and professional development for volunteers. Museums and Galleries NSW should be funded to a standard where they can inject frequent industry standard skills development across the gallery and museums sector.

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

- The demise of Museums Australia has had some impact on opportunities to support the activities of the volunteer run museums. The role of Museums and Galleries NSW should be elevated and better funded to provide more hands-on training and support to improve collecting management and standards in the across the regional gallery and museum sector.

- Marketing budgets for regional galleries have generally tended to be small and almost non-existent for volunteer run museums, ultimately limiting their reach. The development and funding of a state-wide media campaign on an annual

basis across regional print media, radio and television broadcasting would have an unprecedented impact on visits and general appreciation/awareness of the sector.

- The Visit NSW website has been one excellent and cost effective avenue for promoting regional galleries. Perhaps a strong and ongoing partnership should be developed to add leverage to the potential for marketing both regional galleries and the volunteer run museums.

- Funding and professional expertise to assist regional galleries and museums (including volunteer run museums) to digitize their collections and get them online is fundamental to their role both now and into the future in telling the Australian story, informing Australians and assisting researchers. A dedicated program set up through Museums and Galleries NSW with a commission to develop a simple search engine and program with enough capacity to display high quality images and adequate text would be fundamental to this cause.

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

- Touring exhibitions have always been an important part of the regional galleries annual programs. More accessible funding (and less odious funding requirements than the federal Visions of Australia program) needs to be established for developing smaller exhibitions and exhibition exchanges between regional galleries. Most regional galleries depend on limited program budgets to develop diverse content. A funding program for small/limited range touring exhibitions would ensure for greater levels of quality product in the market of exhibitions.

- Regional galleries (and larger metropolitan galleries) have generally been helpful in making work available for loan across the sector in the regions. However, industry standards around climate control/security/handling issues will often intervene for smaller or less resourced facilities denying them and their communities the opportunity to enjoy these loans of art work (Please refer back to the major funding issues for infrastructure at the beginning of this document).

- Each year many smaller (and larger) regional galleries develop exceptional one off exhibitions for their program. Resources and funding limitations generally mean that the potential to take these exhibitions further in terms of educational resources or limited tours to other galleries and so by reducing access to regional Australian content.

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

A simple strategy would be to not relocate the Powerhouse Museum but keep the flagship building in Ultimo and properly fund satellite museums in major Western Sydney locations. It has been stated in the media that no large city of the size and importance of Sydney should lose any cultural institutions, especially from the centre of the city. If this were to be the case then why not similarly relocate the Sydney Opera House and sell off Bennelong Point to property developers and make that gain for the state's coffers? Then why not ask why whole government departments and the NSW Parliament should not all be relocated to the fringes of the urban area. Surely the housing estates and the car infrastructure will catch up one day?

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

- Avoid much advice from local government authorities where they have to date not been helpful in developing regional culture or where those authorities have poorly thought out cultural plans and policies. Choose from those who have made major decisions to include arts/cultural development as a major part of their future.

- Consider advice from all stakeholders, including gallery and museum staff, volunteers, peak organisations (Museums and Galleries NSW, NAVA, Regional Arts NSW, Artworkers Union NSW), gallery societies/support groups and regional artists.

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

- Cultural institutions, especially those located in regional New South Wales should not be expected to become revenue raising enterprises – they do not have the staff time or resources and should not be seconded from their primary professional roles to generate extra income for a larger organisation. Many regional galleries contribute fairly and within their charters to income for their managing authorities (which are largely local government).

- The role of these institutions is to provide a cultural and historical educational experience. If they are to compete in the market they already are up against professionals who are focused on making income.

- The efficiency dividend costs government departments in terms of service levels and in terms of the levels of stress on mental health of employees who are expected to deliver unreasonable outcomes for the unreasonable expectations of over eager general Managers and Mayors. I would suggest that an anonymous survey be conducted via local government Human Resources departments across New South Wales to calculate the number of staff who have taken stress leave or other health based leave as a result of recent restructures and the currently evolving Council amalgamations and see where this has led in terms of the loss of productivity and the attrition of seriously skilled and experienced people in the local government sector as a whole. Quantative reporting doth butter no parsnips (and removes people from providing service).

- Where regional galleries are independently managed, in the examples of Moree Plains Gallery and New England Regional Art Museum (both of these receive substantial financial support from their local councils but are independently managed by boards), they endeavour to increase revenue opportunities through: gallery shops, fees and charges for hire, events and public programs. However, all of these regional institutions need to be able to cater for a broad range socio-economic groups. Income levels in regional areas vary dramatically from high earning property based individuals in rural and professional enterprise through to trade classes, merchants and through on to low paid rural workers and then to individuals on various forms of government support, all of whom by right must have access to cultural development.

- Public libraries are enshrined by an Act of Parliament to assist with access to information and literacy and are not expected to pick up revenue (or at least not very much) on behalf of local government authorities. Public galleries and museums should not be expected to undertake this beyond a reasonable capacity and certainly not where it starts to interfere with their ability to promote and develop local cultural practice, or where they are run specifically on volunteer labour.

- Please refer to the funding levels provided to the gallery/museum sector by the Victorian State Government.

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

- The role of regional galleries in supporting cultural tourism is very important. Collections of art held in regional areas are a major drawcard. Whether specialized or broad in their holdings the collections contain works of local, regional and national significance: Moree Plains Gallery contains one of the major collections of Aboriginal art outside of a metropolitan institution; New England Regional Art Museum holds the Hinton Collection and the Chandler Coventry Collection, both spanning almost 100 years of Australian art; Western Plains Cultural centre specializes in book illustrations and works focused on animals to link to the Western Plains Zoo. Other regional Galleries such as at Broken Hill have extraordinary historical works donated by George Paterson (founding Chairman of BHP) from 1904 along with art documenting the evolving history of that city and the Outback. Where else outside of Sydney would you see a major English history painting of the calibre of *Vae Victus! The Sack of Morocco by the Almohades, Woe to the Vanquished* 1890 or rare early paintings by Lloyd Rees, Margaret Preston and Rupert Bunny.

- The legacy of the popular and unmistakable Pro Hart is featured at Broken Hill along with the other members of the Brushmen of the Bush group – this is an enormous drawcard for at least two generations of Australians. Pro Hart's family have also been generous benefactors is gifting important Aboriginal works to the collection, including Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Michael Nelson Tjackamarra and Emily Kame Knagarrweye. The Hart family also fund the prize money for the nationally acclaimed Pro Hart Outback Art Prize.

- Broken Hill Regional Gallery, again by example (as does New England Regional Art Museum), enjoys the luxury of a gallery dedicated to the display of the major works from the permanent collection, allowing visitors to experience one of the finest public collections in regional New South Wales.

- Many regional galleries have a long tradition of supporting local Aboriginal culture. The far west Aboriginal communities have never experienced the high level of support for cultural development as those in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. The role played by many regional galleries in New South Wales provides that outlet and encouragement for developing and promoting Aboriginal artists. Moree Plains Gallery and Broken Hill Regional Gallery both have a strong record in exhibiting and assisting these artists to develop their culture. Tourists expect to see something of each Aboriginal culture when traversing the State and where no specialized Aboriginal institution exists the regional galleries and volunteer museums play an important role.

i) any other related matter.

The Regional Arts Economy

- Regional galleries play a seminal role in the development of the regional arts economy by presenting exhibitions and other activities by local artists. The regions are full of artists. Many areas have seen a big influx of artists looking for affordable accommodation and the establishment of livelihoods away from the metropolitan areas (Broken Hill, The Shoalhaven/South Coast, Mid and Far North Coast, Central West and Southern Highlands have many practising professional artists).

- Many galleries sell art works on commission from local exhibitions, both through their exhibition programs and retail outlets.

- Regional Galleries offer professional development opportunities through practice-based arts workshops, master classes and lectures. This alone is a significant contribution by regional galleries when considering the decline in the number of arts-based courses in the regional TAFE institutes. Many of these activities in the galleries are delivered by local resident artists, and for which they are paid. Many more professional artists are invited, either as part of an exhibition program, or simply because there is a perceived need to present their particular area of expertise.

- Local artists are engaged to conduct activities for children and young people, such as after school, weekend and holiday workshops, for which the artists are paid.

- Artists living in the regions of New South Wales are generally building our culture and interpreting regional and local ideas. Without the regional galleries and their support we would not know about our local Aboriginal culture. We would not know for example that the artist AF Fulgence from Kangaroo Valley is particularly interested in the pig hunting culture, recording and celebrating the interests of the hunting community and the stories of those who choose this lifestyle.

- Health and wellbeing is a recently added catch cry to life in general and includes participation in cultural/arts activities. It has been noted that relatively new professions, such as Art Therapy, will play a major role once the National Disability Insurance Scheme has been rolled out. Art Therapists already play an important role in the regional mental health services and it appears that they will continue to be in evidence in the broader health sector in the near future.

I trust that the aforementioned submission will be of some assistance for the learned members of the Legislative Council in their investigations and I am very happy to be contacted if further information or clarification is required.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce Tindale