

**Supplementary
Submission
No 149b**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Ms Kylie Winkworth

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Submission from Kylie Winkworth, independent museum and heritage consultant

A note about my experience is at the end of this submission.

This submission addresses the following terms of reference with particular focus on museums in regional NSW:

- a) NSW government policy funding and support for museums and galleries
- c) Opportunities to revitalise the structure, reach and impact of museums

The focus of this submission is on museums in regional NSW and Western Sydney, particularly volunteer managed community museums and historical societies. However their underfunding cannot be seen in isolation from the larger ad hoc arrangement of NSW government museums, and the lack of a policy for museums in NSW highlighted in another submission to this Inquiry.

The funding formula for museums in NSW is based on trickle-down economics. A small circle of state government museums in Sydney is relatively well-funded by the state government. A small group of regional museums is funded by councils. They have some chance of accessing grants through the Arts NSW ACDP fund. That leaves more than 300 community museums managed by volunteers with access to devolved funding via Museums and Galleries NSW. In 2014-15 this totalled just \$85,000. Across 43 successful applicants the average grant was \$1,978.

The result is cultural ghetto of poverty and entrenched disadvantage. Community museums have a difficult pathway to secure adequate funding for their buildings, exhibitions and to care for their collections. Their volunteers do an amazing job working in sometimes decrepit buildings. With better support and investment in buildings, exhibitions and education, community museums could reach bigger audiences and better support cultural and heritage tourism in their region.

The absence of a policy and a fair funding framework for museums in regional NSW imperils their future and the security of their collections. Culture doesn't come out of a vacuum; it comes out of local stories, people and a sense of place. Most of these unique stories and their related collections are held in community museums managed by volunteers. These museums have been ignored by government and arts bodies. They need better programs of support to secure their future and share their collections and stories with new generations of visitors.

a) Government policy and support for NSW museums and galleries

The government has no policy or plan for museums in NSW. It has a list of infrastructure projects for some of the NSW cultural institutions. It has an arts and cultural policy framework *Create in NSW*, released in February 2015¹. But it has no policy or strategy for museums and galleries in NSW.

Of all the states and territories, NSW has the most city centric and inequitable funding structure for museums. Regional communities receive few benefits from their tax dollars invested in NSW

government museums. Unlike Queensland, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory, all the NSW government museums are in the city,² and there are no regional branches to share collections and anchor important regional stories.³

The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences used to have a network of branch museums in regional cities such as Goulburn, Bathurst, Maitland, Albury and Broken Hill, but these were closed in the 1980s as the Powerhouse Museum project was under development. This has left NSW with a very unequal concentration of museum resources in Sydney, and no strategy to interpret stories of major significance for NSW history and its development.

The cultural needs of the growing communities in western Sydney have properly attracted a lot of attention in recent years. Cultural infrastructure funding for museums and galleries in western Sydney is vital. But governments should not privilege and fund cultural infrastructure in western Sydney while neglecting the needs of communities across regional NSW. This is what has happened over the last 15 years. Western Sydney's cultural infrastructure has been relatively well supported, via the previous Labor government's \$30m western Sydney Arts Strategy, which funded the development of major cultural infrastructure in Casula, Campbelltown, Penrith and Parramatta. From 2002-2010, western Sydney attracted \$55m in cultural infrastructure funding.⁴

But there has been no regional NSW cultural strategy to fund high quality cultural infrastructure in the regions. The most glaring cultural inequality then is not the disparity of cultural funding between the city and western Sydney, where at least the city museums are within relatively easy reach, but between Sydney and regional NSW where 30% of the population live. Funding for cultural infrastructure in regional NSW is derisory. In 2016 the Arts NSW regional cultural infrastructure grant round allocated just \$385,000. The biggest grant was \$60,000.⁵ If this was health or education funding there would be outcry.

Already regional communities in NSW are triple taxed for culture, paying state and federal taxes to support state and national cultural institutions, from which they receive few benefits, and then funding cultural facilities in their region through council rates.

In recent years major cultural infrastructure projects in regional NSW have been built with no capital contribution from the NSW government. The \$10.5m Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA) which opened in 2015 was two thirds funded by council and the community. The soon to open \$8m Orange Regional Museum is funded through rates and a grant from the federal government. The \$18m Dubbo convention centre was built by council with no contribution from the state government.

Although the *Create in NSW* policy framework and the *2014 State Infrastructure Strategy Update* both commit to funding regional cultural infrastructure, the Arts Minister has since suggested that cultural infrastructure projects in western Sydney and regional NSW should be funded by local government.⁶

The *Rebuilding NSW State Infrastructure NSW Strategy* promised that the state government would actively collaborate with local government around opportunities for cultural facilities in regional centres.⁷ So far there has not been any announcement on partnership funding opportunities.

The policy also said that \$300m would be set aside for regional and environmental tourism facilities. So far it seems that most of this funding has been badged to transport infrastructure upgrades, such as airports, leaving cultural infrastructure out in the cold.

In other states such as Victoria, and some museum projects in WA, new regional cultural infrastructure is built through a three-way partnership funding model between the federal, state and local governments; for example the Museum of Australian Democracy in Ballarat. NSW should fund regional cultural infrastructure in partnership with councils and the federal government.

The State Library of NSW has a state wide mission and supports the network of regional and community libraries. But there is no equivalent Museum of NSW with a service mission to support museums across NSW. While NSW government museums have modest regional programs, these have shrunk in recent years and there has been a marked withdrawal of services and a loss of focus on state museums reaching a state wide audience.

The government's promise to develop a new museum in Parramatta is welcome, although not at the cost and waste of demolishing the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo. But at a likely cost of close to \$1b for one museum just 23ks west of the city, the new museum will do little to address entrenched cultural inequality, particularly for communities in regional NSW. The government has not revealed if it has done a cost benefit analysis or considered the opportunity cost of sinking this much money into one museum for a community that is just 25 minutes from Sydney. It is not fair, equal or transparent to be committing this much funding to one new museum while ignoring the needs of museums and galleries in regional NSW. And as many people from regional NSW have commented, moving the PHM from Ultimo will make it difficult for them to visit the museum when they're in Sydney.

While NSW has a well-established network of regional galleries in major regional cities, managed by councils and with paid staff; regional museums are less developed. NSW has a handful of regional museums managed by councils: Albury, Wagga, Bathurst, Orange, Newcastle and the Tweed. Large areas of the state have no paid museum curators to support museums and collections; for example there is no paid curator for all the museums between Newcastle and the Tweed. Major regional cities such as Wollongong also have no paid curator to support networks and museums and heritage collections in the region. And there is no paid museum curator in the Hunter to support dozens of museums with significant collections. A previous museum policy to develop a network of regional museums to support community museums in each region was lost when the arts and cultural grants were rolled into a single program in 2009.

Funding for museums in regional NSW has gone backwards since the dedicated museum program was abolished and its \$1.8m in annual funding for capital works, salary subsidies and programs was rolled into a single arts program. Museums and collections in NSW secured a tiny share of the 2016 Arts and Cultural Development Program grants, just 1.13% of the funding.⁸ There were no regional partnership grants to museums, and no museum projects were funded in round 1 of the project grants. Since the art form specific grants were consolidated into a single fund, museums have had difficulty securing grants in a program which is tailored to professional arts practice.

The most disadvantaged cultural organisations in NSW are the more than 300 volunteer managed community museums and historical societies. These museums are not even mentioned in the *Create*

in NSW policy. These are the oldest and most numerous cultural organisations in NSW with the most volunteers working in sometimes decrepit and not fit for purpose buildings, caring for irreplaceable heritage collections which tell the stories of their communities, and they have little access to funding and support. Many of the volunteers are in their 70s and 80s and are working 40 hours a week to keep the museum going.

Funding for these museums and their collections is miniscule. While the devolved grants from Museums and Galleries NSW are keenly sought and highly valued, the 2015 grants for community museums had only \$48,000 available for the more than 300 community museums across regional NSW with the largest grant just \$7,500.⁹ The small VIM grant program had just \$20,000 to distribute to volunteer museums with a maximum grant of \$2,000.¹⁰

Many community museums manage significant collections with objects of state and national significance. They collect and interpret themes and stories that are not well represented in NSW state museums. They are centres of education, research, heritage interpretation and social connection. They attract tourists and show visitors what to see in the district. They could do so much more of there was a fairer museum policy and funding support.

c) Recommendations/ Opportunities to revitalise the structure, reach and impact of museums

1. A NSW museum policy is needed as a framework to support museums and collections across NSW.
2. NSW must have a state museum responsible for NSW history. The Museum of NSW should be vertically integrated to support regional museums in the major regional cities of NSW, in partnership with councils. It would work with regional and community partners on collection research and collaborative projects, along the lines of the Migration Heritage Centre's partnerships.
3. The NSW government should develop a single portal for NSW collections and stories, along the lines of the Victorian Collections site.
<http://www.cv.vic.gov.au/> <https://victoriancollections.net.au/>
4. The NSW Migration Heritage centre should be revived as part of the Museum of NSW.
5. There should be funding for regional museums to support the network of community museums and heritage places in the region. In this way every community in NSW would be supported and equipped to care for their museums and heritage collections. The Sustainable Collections Program in Orange is an exemplary model demonstrating the effectiveness of this structure.
6. Capital infrastructure for regional museums should be funded by the NSW government in a three way partnership with councils and the federal government. Meaningful funding incentives are needed to develop a regional museums managed by councils.

7. Regional museums should be framed around distinctive regional stories and themes so they develop cultural and heritage tourism in their region.
8. The NSW museum plan should explore the feasibility of re-establishing the network of landmark branch museums in regional NSW, as was once operated by MAAS. A new branch museum network could be developed in partnership with key regional cities so NSW does justice to important themes and stories currently neglected or ignored; including wool, water, forests, agriculture, transport, Aboriginal contact history, NSW rivers, gold etc
9. The NSW museum plan should consider options for accessible regional repositories of state collections otherwise hidden in storage, especially for collections linked to regional NSW.
10. In smaller rural towns and villages capital grants should be available to councils for communities to plan and build multipurpose arts, heritage, library and cultural facilities, with 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 small scale travelling exhibitions.
11. While the support of city based museum services is appreciated, the funding priority must be to employ paid trained collections officers to work with community museums and their collections in every region. The well tried outreach models of city based advisory services have not been sufficient to address the critical needs of community museums and their collections.
12. Collections grants should be available for museum networks in regional NSW to work on collections, places and tourism projects – see for example the *Our Rivers Our History* project on the mid north coast <http://www.oroh.com.au/> These projects document significant objects, interpret local stories and collections, and improve community, education and cultural tourism outcomes.
13. The former Arts NSW Heritage Office partnership should be reactivated to support museums in heritage buildings and priority work on collections and movable heritage. Museums lack appropriate support and funding because they fall between the two stools of arts and heritage. A dedicated well targeted grant program is needed to address the specific needs of museums and the conservation of their collections and buildings.
14. Museums in heritage buildings need funding support to care for their significant buildings. There should be funding for Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) and site masterplans for museums in heritage buildings, with follow up funding for conservation and new works; the plans to prioritise improved collection storage and new temporary exhibition spaces.
15. Many community museums are managing significant collections and archives with very poor storage. Capital grants should be offered to help museums design and build new storage and archives, and spaces for education activities and temporary exhibitions. Other options

for museums to share new high quality accessible storage facilities in a region should also be considered.

16. Funding and policy deficits for museums in regional NSW are not just a state government issue. It is the same situation across Australia. The NSW Arts Minister should put the future of community museums on the agenda of the Cultural Ministers Council, and call for a review of the funding, support and sustainability of community museums and collections in regional Australia. Collections are the notable gap in the Commonwealth's support for arts and culture, and in their funding programs.

Case Study of a Community Museum in Action

The Manning Valley Historical Society provides a snapshot of the work of museum volunteers in Wingham, (population 4500) on the mid-north coast of NSW. The Society began in 1964 and the museum, which is open seven days a week, is in an historic shop purchased in 1974. It is the oldest commercial building in Wingham. The vernacular timber building would probably not have survived without the Society's acquisition and restoration. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays there may be up to 20 volunteers at work on the collections, archives and building. Recent work in a three month period includes researching the significance of the collection, reorganising the collection working space, documenting costumes for nomination to the Powerhouse Museum's Australian Dress Register, updating the catalogue database, hosting school visits, digitising photographs, indexing local newspapers, contributing a regular history feature to the *Wingham Chronicle* and answering research enquiries. The Society's archives are the most important local studies collection in the district and are used for all kinds of heritage studies and local history queries. In addition, the Society published its journal, which is issued three times a year, a newsletter and a new book, *Postcards from the Front*, in time for Anzac Day. Working with the tourism information centre, volunteers supplied copies of historic photographs and captions for interpretive signs. And they initiated a project to put historic photos of buildings and businesses in shop windows in Wingham. Museum volunteers were involved in fundraising for the Cancer Council, participating in the Biggest Morning Tea event. And volunteers helped organise the Scottish Festival, a three-day event initiated by the Historical Society. It is now a fixture on the tourism calendar of Wingham. Apart from economic development, tourism services and managing cultural assets, volunteer museums like the Manning Valley Historical Society generate other benefits for their communities, such as workplace training for the unemployed and social inclusion for older people and people with disabilities. A widow confided that the museum was her lifeline in coping with grief and loneliness after her husband's death.¹¹

About Kylie Winkworth

Kylie Winkworth is an independent museum and heritage consultant with long experience in regional and community museums, movable heritage and collections. She has worked in regional Australia with heritage places and collecting organisations, museums and local government, developing strategic plans, feasibility studies, exhibitions and collaborative projects. She has a particular interest in museum renewal and sustainability and in the wider issues of government

policy and funding for collections. Her publications include *Significance 2.0*, co-authored with Roslyn Russell, which is now widely used by collecting organisations; and *Thematic Studies of Museum and Heritage Collections, a guide for museums, heritage networks and communities for the Queensland Heritage Trails Network*.

¹ <http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/index.php/arts-in-nsw/create-in-nsw/the-nsw-arts-and-cultural-policy-framework-create-in-nsw/>

² The lone exception is Meroogal, an historic house at Nowra.

³ Other states operate networks of regional branch museums. For example the WA museum in Perth, includes the WA Maritime Museum in Fremantle, and museums in Albany, Geraldton, and Kalgoorlie Boulder. The Queensland Museum has regional branches in the Workshops Rail Museum at Ipswich, the Cobb and Co Museum in Toowoomba and the Museum of Tropical Queensland in Townsville, and a museum of Lands Mapping and Surveying. Each in their own ways makes a major contribution to the economy and cultural life of their city. They are highly regarded and well supported by their communities. Townsville is a major tourist attraction and an international leader in research on coral reefs; Cobb and Co has a fine collection of horse drawn vehicles and has an innovative heritage trades partnership with the technical college; the Ipswich Rail Workshops are also highly regarded for their education, hands on and family programs and in keeping rail heritage skills alive.

⁴ <http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/index.php/arts-in-nsw/arts-in-western-sydney-2/>

⁵ http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/30216_NSW-Government-builds-up-regional-art.pdf

⁶ <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/arts-minister-on-collision-course-with-western-sydney-and-regional-nsw-over-funding-20160121-gmau9r.html>

⁷ Section 4.5, p.48. https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/miscellaneous/sc000222_2014-state-infrastructure-strategy_nov24_web.pdf

⁸ <http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Program-Assessment-Meeting-Report-2015.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Troy-Grant-med-rel-48000-for-regional-museums.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/20150722-AG-Grants-and-professional-development-for-art-and-culture-in-NSW.pdf>

¹¹ Kylie Winkworth 'Let a Thousand 'Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom: museums in regional Australia', in *Understanding Museums*, edited by Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien, National Museum of Australia, 2011. <http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/>