

**Supplementary
Submission
No 149e**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries in NSW

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4

Submission from Kylie Winkworth, independent museum and heritage consultant

This submission addresses the following term of reference:

h) The economic impact of museums and galleries on cultural tourism, and their role in supporting the visitor economy of Sydney and Regional NSW

Over the last 20 years NSW has under-invested in cultural infrastructure. This shows in its performance relative to other states, collections hidden in storage and a lack of innovation and creativity in programming. NSW has a lower per capita spend on culture than all other jurisdictions except Victoria; about \$40 less per person.¹ While there have been modest extensions and refurbishments of the museums and galleries in Sydney, and the opening of Carriageworks at Eveleigh, there have been no new museums, nor fresh thinking about museum opportunities. In the years 2007-10 cultural spending in NSW decreased by 23%.

Cultural and heritage visitors spend almost twice as much as other international visitors.² NSW cultural institutions attracted 4.8 million paying visitors who contributed \$8.3b to the NSW economy. This economic return is not reflected in the government's cultural infrastructure spending priorities, or the strategy and cultural spend of Destination NSW which is skewed to events. In the lead up to the 2000 Olympics there was massive investment in new sporting infrastructure and cultural institutions were on hard rations. Since then there has been no re-calibration of funding and investment in museums and galleries. The government has allocated just \$600m for cultural infrastructure from the sale of the poles and wires electricity assets. Of this, \$341m has already been allocated to the Sydney Opera House (\$202m) and Walsh Bay (\$139m), leaving only **\$259m** for cultural infrastructure projects in rest of Sydney and NSW.

At the same time the government has boosted its commitment to sporting stadiums from \$600m to \$1.6b.³ **This is inexplicable.** Even the 2014 State Infrastructure Strategy Update says there's an oversupply of sporting infrastructure capacity.⁴ Venues have low rates of utilisation, and attendance at these stadiums is a fraction of the attendance at museums and galleries which provide a far higher economic return. Indeed more people go to small museums and galleries across NSW, which get no investment from the NSW Government, than go to the lavishly funded stadiums.⁵

Average expenditure over the last 10 years across the sports and cultural sectors has allocated roughly 55% to sporting venues and just 45% on cultural venues. This makes no economic, social or cultural sense.⁶

It would appear that funding for needless upgrades of under-utilised sporting stadiums is seen as a political opportunity, and pleases the boys club, but funding for cultural infrastructure is evidently seen as a cost, not as an investment with a high rate of economic return – not to mention profound cultural and education benefits. The government seems to have no policy process that might weigh up what else could be done with the unnecessary \$1.6b expenditure on stadiums. This figure would fund at least five destination museums in regional NSW, a new museum in Parramatta, an

Indigenous Cultural Centre, an exciting new design museum in the city, and keep the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo.

Cultural tourists have a great interest in exploring heritage places and stories. The 2011 *Planning Sydney's Cultural Facilities* review noted the relative lack of social history museums and suggested that Sydney does not capitalise on its strong cultural heritage.⁷ The biggest opportunity to create a new landmark heritage destination is the Fleet St heritage precinct in Parramatta. If managed carefully, the conservation and development of this internationally significant site could be an exciting new cultural tourism destination with sufficient critical mass and interest to bring international visitors from the city. This site should be conserved and developed as a multi-dimensional heritage, museum, education and arts precinct. Heritage and cultural planning must guide the design and uses of the site, not development opportunity and revenue generation. It is inconceivable that a forest of high rise, as planned for this site, would be tolerated if it was in the city or eastern suburbs. Control of the Fleet St Heritage precinct must be taken out of the hands of Urban Growth which has no skills and expertise in heritage and cultural planning. A joint Arts NSW/ and Heritage Office taskforce should guide the planning of the site.

NSW does not have a strategy to develop 'destination' museums in regional NSW that might attract international visitors, or showcase areas of interest to visitors such as Aboriginal culture, Chinese history, produce, food and wine. This contrasts with Queensland which invested \$110m in developing a network of regional heritage trails, anchored by destination attractions such as the Waltzing Matilda Centre at Winton, the Stockman's Hall of Fame at Longreach and the Barcaldine Heritage Centre. Victoria also has outstanding regional galleries and museums, and Queensland and WA both have branches of their state museums in regional cities.

Unlike other states, NSW has no regional museums with the critical mass or quality of infrastructure to do justice to important themes in NSW history. While Ballarat has built a significant tourism industry around its gold history, and NSW students go on excursions to Ballarat, the site of the first discovery of payable gold at Ophir near Orange is only marked by a few signs. There is no policy to coordinate or prioritise the interpretation of significant regional stories or destinations which are important for the history of NSW and which might underpin regional tourism. Key omissions include regional interpretations on wool, irrigation, agriculture, water, forests, mining and Aboriginal culture.

The Victorian sandstone buildings of Sydney are one of its glories and are a distinctive part of its history and architecture. It is crass and short sighted for the government to dispose of the Lands and Education buildings without investigating if they could have a new use as cultural facilities, especially when these national treasures realised only \$35m.⁸ It is inconceivable that other international tourism cities renowned for their culture and architecture, such as Berlin, Rome and Copenhagen, would sell off such important buildings and then allow a developer to put a huge box on top. International visitors do not come to see heritage buildings shouldering ugly modern boxes. It shows a lack of imagination and respect for NSW history and heritage, and it is bad economics. NSW is not so poor that we are unable to maintain such important buildings in the public domain with cultural uses that would generate a higher rate of return and tourism impact. The government should be adapting significant heritage buildings in public ownership for cultural uses, just as earlier NSW governments saved the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks.

Recommendations

1. Funding for museums and galleries in NSW must be expanded in the context of a NSW Museum Plan
2. The cultural investment deficit in regional NSW must be redressed with a strategy to develop destination museums in major regional cities. These could be branch museums of proposed Museum of NSW, developed in partnerships with local government.
3. The weighting of the government's investment in culture and stadiums must be recalibrated to increase the proportion of cultural funding over stadiums, given its higher return on investment, visitation/ usage and demonstrated community and education benefits
4. Destination NSW should increase its investment in major cultural projects and exhibitions in Sydney and regional NSW
5. Distinguished public heritage buildings in the city and in the Fleet St heritage precinct at Parramatta are an important part of the history of NSW should be adapted for cultural uses, not sold for a pittance. Nor should they be overshadowed by a forest of high rise as currently proposed for the Fleet St heritage precinct.
6. The Fleet St Heritage precinct in Parramatta should be taken out of the hands of Urban Growth whose purpose, mission and expertise is incompatible with heritage conservation and cultural development.
7. The Minister for the Arts, the Heritage Minister and other NSW Ministers in charge of selling landmark heritage buildings for a pittance, and approving ugly boxes on heritage buildings, should go to Berlin at the earliest opportunity. There they would see how conserving heritage buildings and streetscapes, and investing in museums in driving the cultural revival, tourism and global brand of Berlin as a magnet for visitors. Investment in culture and cultural facilities pays dividends.

¹ However unlike NSW Victoria has had major investment in its museums in the last 20 years including the Melbourne Museum, the expansion and redesign of the NGV, and the Ian Potter Centre at Federation Square.

² 2014 State Infrastructure Strategy Update, p116

http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/media/42966/inf_j14_871_sis_report_ch09_web_new.pdf

³ Of the \$600m in the cultural infrastructure fund \$341m has already been allocated to the Sydney Opera House (\$202m) and Walsh Bay (\$139m), leaving only \$259m for cultural infrastructure projects in rest of Sydney and NSW.

⁴ 2014 State Infrastructure Strategy Update, p.129

http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/media/42966/inf_j14_871_sis_report_ch09_web_new.pdf

⁵ 5 million people attend small museums and galleries across NSW, p.12

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

⁶ Infrastructure NSW, 2014 *State Infrastructure Strategy Update*, p.116

⁷ <http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/index.php/creative-spaces/planning-sydneys-cultural-facilities/review-of-sydneys-cultural-facilities/>

⁸ <http://www.smh.com.au/business/property/singaporean-pontiac-land-wins-sandstones-buildings-20150915-gjmv4g.html>