

**Supplementary
Submission
No 67a**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Ms Judith White

Date received: 29 April 2017

FURTHER SUBMISSION

to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 of the New South Wales Parliament Legislative Council - INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

From Judith White, author of *Culture Heist* published by Brandl & Schlesinger May 2017 – www.cultureheist.com.au

STATEMENT

My thanks to the committee for the opportunity to make an additional submission, given your extended deadline. This follows my submission no.67 dated 4 August 2016, and is based on the completed text of my book *Culture Heist*, details above, of which copies are being supplied to the committee chair.

Terms of reference a)

My book documents how at the Art Gallery of New South Wales the overwhelming focus on the four-year campaign to raise finance for the proposed Sydney Modern extension, announced in 2013 with no funding commitment, has been accompanied by a loss of curatorial expertise, a growth of bureaucracy, a growing sense of disengagement and alienation among the core audience and a diminution in the number and role of volunteers.

I contend that the project should be put on hold for a re-evaluation with full public consultation, in order to restore confidence in the institution.

In addition to the examples in my submission no.67 of the slowdown in museum expansion projects worldwide, the following developments should be noted:

- *Inside Philanthropy* magazine has written of a new trend in the United States as “a strategy that shuns new mega-wings... and endless fundraising to pay for the project’s upkeep”.
- The Metropolitan Museum in New York has had to scale down its ambitious building program and its director Thomas Campbell has resigned following concerns about the burgeoning annual deficit.
- The inaugural Verbier Art Summit of European cultural institution leaders, held in January 2017, heard a paper from Stedelijk Museum director Beatrix Ruf advocating “de-growth” – that is, putting capital expenditure projects on hold in order to focus on the development of collections and exhibition programs.

(The latter two points have come to light since my book went to press.)

Terms of reference c)

Revitalising the reach, impact, research and collecting priorities of galleries and museums requires ensuring that the focus on scholarship and curatorship is not damaged by budgetary stringency and the need to develop commercial revenue streams. The objectives need to go hand in hand. *Culture Heist*, especially pp202-206, documents the danger to institutions in breaking the chain of curatorial expertise. This relates to the following point:

Terms of reference g)

Academics have now documented the deleterious effect of efficiency dividends in the public sector, for example in Dr Kristin van Barneveld's paper in *Public Space: The Journal of Law and Social Justice* Vol 3, UTS Sydney 2009.

Budgets that stipulate a reduction in full-time positions as part of the efficiency dividend have a particularly damaging impact in the museums and galleries sector. At a federal level, the Commonwealth Public Service Union claims that several national institutions are unable, as a result of such measures, to fulfil their statutory role in protecting Australia's cultural heritage.

Terms of reference i)

My submission no.67 pointed to the introduction of a range of fee-paying programs for schools at the AGNSW. These are now a reality. Whereas previously volunteers had provided free one-hour tours for all schools irrespective of their location or status, now only 20 minutes are available free, and to obtain a 60-minute tour without cost schools must provide evidence of "low SES (socio-economic status)", while further programs for schools are available only on a fee-paying basis. This is not in keeping with the ethos of a public institution.

Thank you again for considering this submission.

Judith White

29 April 2017