

**Submission
No 190**

INQUIRY INTO THE MUSIC AND ARTS ECONOMY IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: South West Music Regional Conservatorium

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Music and Arts Economy in New South Wales

Submission to the Portfolio Committee No.6

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Introduction

South West Music Regional Conservatorium (SWMRC) is one of 17 Regional Conservatoriums around NSW that provide music education and professional performance opportunities to communities right across the State. The network of Regional Conservatoriums, partially funded by the Department of Education, currently has approximately 25,000 students engaged in some form of music education, ranging from instrumental and vocal tuition to classroom music education programs in schools. This network is represented through the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums (ANSWRC).

Our Conservatorium alone services around 300 students, ranging in locations including Moama, Hay, Balranald, Moulamein, Clare, Carrathool, Coleambally, Griffith, and here at our base in Deniliquin. We teach at schools both face to face and by video conferencing, using Polycom 7000 as the medium.

After-school lessons are delivered at our studios in Hardinge St Deniliquin. We also teach adults, people with a disability, Indigenous groups and individuals, and run choral rehearsals. In addition, we also provide a concert series each year that attracts professional musicians from around the country, and usually stage these concerts monthly, in a range of towns and venues.

Key Issues

The greatest impediment to our penetration into a greater proportion of the regional community lies in the lack of available purpose built infrastructure, that could afford a greater engagement of these communities into Arts and Culture, especially in the music field. This lack of infrastructure creates a requirement for our organisation to compromise into venues that are not resourced appropriately, not ideally located, and therefore do not always satisfy the drivers of our Strategic Plan, that demands a greater engagement with the community. We are currently located at the rear of a Caltex service station which is a substantial distance from the centre of town, the high school, and other Arts facilitators. This creates a barrier for collaborative ventures, and fragments the various Cultural Organisations from each other. Having a closer proximity to the community and like organisations, in the form of an Arts precinct, would allow the experience of the user to be more fulfilling and engaging.

Evidence

A recent study entitled “A plan for progressing the Arts, Culture, Creativity and Innovation Ecosystem in the Plains of Southern NSW and Northern Victoria” (please see attached) identified the lack of appropriate infrastructure for SWMRC as a significant impediment to any further development of the Organisation, and the subsequent positive effects this would have on the township and the surrounding region. The other significant Arts providers include South West Arts, Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre and Outback Theatre for Young People. The implications of being able to collaborate with these organisations in a venue that was purpose built would be profound.

Case Studies

Presently, our risk assessment matrix has to include the likelihood of students getting struck by cars or trucks that frequently use our vicinity to access the service station. This is clearly not the ideal situation for any educational facility.

The High School is some distance away, and a proportion of students have to walk here to attend their music lessons. Creating a location that is closer to the school and other providers would significantly improve educational, social and cultural outcomes.

The lack of career based, state of the art facilities, such as recording studios and professional performance venues also creates a drain on the talent that has developed within the district.

Recommendations

The research we have compiled as a result of the studies into the drivers and barriers of Arts and Culture development in this region suggest that the most effective way to address the current issues would be to invest significantly into purpose built infrastructure that would service the cultural and arts expectations of the community satisfactorily, and improve educational outcomes of regional marginalised students.

A range of policy options to address the terms of reference (b) policies that could support a diverse and vibrant music and arts culture across New South Wales, & (c) policies that could support the establishment and sustainability of permanent and temporary venue spaces for music and for the arts, include:

1. The development of policy that facilitates streamlined access to a pool of infrastructure funding streams, specifically to establish permanent purpose built premises for Regional Conservatoriums, and ongoing resource requirements.
2. Funding Regional Conservatoriums on a more permanent basis to allow for long term planning, growth and management of risk.
 - The triennial funding cycle prevents strategic planning to be conducted with more permanent vision and dissuades infrastructure development and asset acquisition with a manageable risk profile. Secure funding would allow Conservatoriums to use financing to support development of permanent venues and enhance recruitment attractiveness, facilitate career pathways for regional students and support a diverse and vibrant music & arts culture across NSW.
 - As education facilities that drive and support vibrant regional communities, a policy change to fully embed the Regional Conservatoriums program within the Department of Education, instead of project based program, would support the terms of reference outcomes.
3. The creation of policy supporting Regional Conservatoriums gaining access to DoE Assets department, including expertise and intelligence. Also, other capital assets in regional communities, such as the unused portions of the Deniliquin TAFE site, in order to create infrastructure potential for the delivery of quality music education and performance. This would also facilitate links to other Arts and Culture organisations and allow a more unified cultural landscape that can attract and service a growing population.

I am unaware of any jurisdiction that has had the foresight to assist Regional Conservatoriums anywhere else in Australia, as this model is unique to New South Wales. The success and sustainability of the programs being delivered by Regional Conservatoriums, including South West Music would be greatly improved with access to infrastructure funding. The flow on benefits to regional communities are numerous and significant including improvements in: educational outcomes, social inclusion, wellbeing, resilience, patience, concentration, as documented in numerous scientific studies (e.g bigger, better brains) and is also reflected in the attached document.