

**Submission
No 27**

**INQUIRY INTO STATE RECORDS ACT 1998 AND THE
POLICY PAPER ON ITS REVIEW**

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Response to the Inquiry into the State Records Act 1998 and the Policy Paper on its review

I am submitting a response to the Inquiry into the State Records Act 1998 and the Policy Paper on its review.

I am writing as a current supporter of Sydney Living Museums and also draw on my knowledge and experience as the inaugural CEO of Museums and Galleries NSW (1999-2010), as a former curator of the then emerging Historic Houses Trust (1979-1982) and in senior roles in various government and non-government heritage and cultural organisations.

I have had particular experience in developing the capabilities of an organisation that was formed through the merging of two government funded organisations (Museums and Galleries NSW). Refer to note at end of submission for examples of other organisations of which I am aware.

Having read the *Terms of Reference for the Inquiry* as well as the Policy Paper, I am confining my response to consideration of the continuing partnership between Sydney Living Museums and the State Records Office and to matters relating to their joint and individual roles in enhancing the protection of, enjoyment of and learning opportunities provided by the state's cultural assets - items 1 (a), 1 (d) - (iii) and (iv) and any other related matters.

IN SUMMARY:

1 (a) - role and purposes of the State Records Authority and Sydney Living Museums.

- Both are excellent organisations with an established reputation for their work.
- Their organisational goals are both compatible and complementary.
- The unity of purpose shared by both organisations forms a strong link that could be optimised through an ongoing partnership/joint role

1 (d)

(iii) whether proposed reforms will increase public knowledge and enjoyment ... for the people of NSW

- The formation of a united organisation can bring a range of diversified skills that could increase the value of the work already undertaken by each single entity
- A more diversified joint organisation could be better able to meet changing needs and new challenges, such as technology, diverging

public interest and future working conditions to increase benefits for the people of NSW

- Both organisations have assets which could be employed to increase public knowledge and enjoyment

(iv) whether proposed reforms will enhance the protection of the key cultural assets of NSW

- Strengthening the role of the two organisations through union can bring enhanced awareness of, credibility and prominence to the role of the organisation both for government and the public - leading to a greater perceived importance of cultural heritage, and enhanced care in its management and protection.
- A new entity may also be better placed to address changing needs through diverse approaches that consolidate the importance of cultural material for the community and thus ensure greater community support for its protection

Given the amount of information available to respondents to this Inquiry, I would support further investigation to conjoin Sydney Living Museums and the State Records Authority in a new relationship - perhaps a single entity.

This would include assessing the impact on the role of the State Records Authority in records management responsibilities and importantly, defining the principles and organisational structure of a new entity.

RESPONSE TO INQUIRY

Two excellent Organisations with common, compatible goals

Currently both the State Records Authority and Sydney Living Museums are, I believe, two excellent organisations that fulfil their individual roles at a high level and provide important benefits to the community.

- * A key issue in considering the future relationship of both, is the compatibility of their roles and whether singly or as a joint body, the entities provide the greatest benefits for the people of NSW.

While the public is accustomed to two separate organisations that deliver specialised services, both have common goals through their engagement with the past through collections of cultural materials to the benefit of the public.

Whether through a building and its site; archival material on architecture and design; or exhibitions and public programming which give context and meaning to physical history (Sydney Living Museums) - or through documents and resources relating to the state's past, research projects that clarify historical events or exhibitions that bring the state's archives to life and amplify their relevance to today's world (the

State Records Authority): all of these cultural resources help us to engage with our history and increase public knowledge of our social, historical and cultural identity.

The unity of purpose forms a strong link between the two organisations. In fulfilling their roles, both organisations:

- Conserve, protect and manage cultural material that provides the basis for their work
- Rely on a solid foundation of documentary and physical evidence and analysis to underpin their work
- Engage with the past and its links to the present through their collections of cultural material
- Develop programs, stories, exhibitions, digital material and publications that link their collections to our cultural identity now and in the future
- Enhance the value and scope of their cultural collections through programs, events, stories, exhibitions, digital material, publications and other material.

Complementary roles as a positive basis for a single organisation:

Each organisation certainly has a specialised role - Sydney Living Museums to manage and conserve sites, while the State Records Authority manages and conserves records, both in document and digital form.

However, while the management and care of diverse items must require specialised knowledge; the interpretation and facilitation of public engagement with this material is currently undertaken by both organisations. Such activity may be strengthened by cross fertilisation between different fields of expertise residing now in the individual entities.

A single organisation, integrating the understanding and expertise from diverse skills and backgrounds can be stronger, more nimble and able to meet new challenges in the presentation and interpretation of cultural material.

This broader knowledge-base has a better chance of realising and meeting changing community needs and attitudes, leading to a better understanding and engagement with the past in an evolving world.

Changes are foreseeable in both organisations. For instance, there are enormous public expectations of digital technology and while both organisations have embraced this, a sharing of resources can enhance the end product.

Even within the professional practices of archival management and house museum management, changes are mooted. For instance, with house properties there are already looming issues in retaining traditional means of interpretation.

The world-wide reduction of public interest in static collections, including those in house museums, has been of concern to professionals in this area and could be addressed by rethinking the current approach. Sydney Living Museums is already addressing this issue, but there is merit in bringing in additional resources, both human and material to stimulate further change.

Broadening the scope of house museum properties to include additional programs such as exhibitions, digital material, installations and other programs that use material from the State Records Authority's archives is one way forward that could increase the importance of house museums for the public

Both organisations bring assets, which if united can lead to richer experiences for the community. For instance, Sydney Living Museums has a number of venues which could provide physical spaces for exhibitions and programming, which utilise the wealth of material in the State Records Authority.

Using archivally derived material in these these venues, many of which are well-placed to attract local and tourist visitors alike, would also enhance public dissemination of the treasury of stories held in our records.

Strengthening of the goals of each organisation through unity:

There may also be advantages in rationalising common roles in both organisations to allow for the development of new roles. However it is important for a joint organisation to ensure that specific skills relevant to specialised needs are retained and developed.

Finally, conferring executive status on a new entity would give greater prominence to its work in the cultural heritage sector. This could enhance awareness of the importance of cultural heritage management for both government and the community and allow the new organisation the scope to build on the reputation of excellent programs to deliver the best outcomes for the community.

In particular, this should enhance the protection of the key cultural assets of this state.

A new single organisation built on the excellence of the State Records Authority and Sydney Living Museums?

There are many positive reasons for the consideration of developing a single organisation, enhancing the current roles of both Sydney Living Museums and the State Records Authority.

My opinion is that this step should be considered positively, with due diligence as to the how and when.

In particular, additional consideration needs to be given to the important role of record management responsibilities, already a major part of the State Record Authority's role.

Maisy Stapleton
9 April 2020

Note: there are many successful organisations throughout NSW that have been formed either through bringing together of two separate functions, or the development of facilities that integrate a diversity of practices under a single management. These include:

- Carriageworks (performance, visual arts, commercial use)
- Western Plains Cultural Centre (visual arts and museum)
- Casula Powerhouse (performing and visual arts)
- Albury Library and Museum
- Campbelltown Arts Centre (performing and visual arts)