INQUIRY INTO GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF THE POWERHOUSE MUSEUM AND OTHER MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL PROJECTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Regional and Public Galleries New South Wales Inc. (RPGNSW)

Date Received: 30 April 2020

RPGNSW

Regional and Public Galleries New South Wales Inc.

SUBMISSION TO:

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF THE POWERHOUSE MUSEUM AND OTHER MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL PROJECTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

30 April 2020

Regional and Public Galleries of NSW is the peak body representing the public gallery sector in New South Wales. All our member galleries are non-profit organisations intent on making important contributions to the cultural life of their regions.

While exhibition delivery has and continues to be the core of what we do, our members play a vital role in bringing community together. Our gallery's stage programs for children and young people; we provide programs for people, and artists, living with a disability and those with differing access needs. We support our diverse multi-cultural communities, and importantly, we connect closely with our Aboriginal and First Nations community members and artists.

The current COVID-19 situation has completely changed our way of operating, but the experience has shown the flexibility of our sector, and more importantly, our continued role in connecting our communities.

Our members have been extending existing programs into the online space, while simultaneously creating new programs within very tight timeframes.

However, as primarily local government entities, our future is complex given the financial impacts that COVID-19 is having on our primary funder. To that end, it is critical that the NSW State Government invests in this vital part of community life.

RPGNSW'S RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

(i) **Current Government policy, funding and support for museums and galleries across regional NSW.**
- The system of funding is currently extremely competitive given the small amount of funds available;
- While the system of funding has been streamlined in the last year, there is still significant complexity around the application and indeed the acquittal process;
- High levels of administration needed to adequately maintain and record KPI's across programs;
- Social value of our programs an increasingly important tool to be able to report on, particularly in the local government context, however it is very difficult to adequately measure this on the resources available to most of our members;
- In 2018 Create NSW commissioned the KPMG report The Economic Value of Arts, Screen and Culture to NSW. This report revealed that local government invest around $520 million in NSW arts, screen and culture each year – much of which is spent in regional NSW – and which is on par with the $549.1 million invested by the NSW Government;
- There is however increasing funding pressure on local government across all its responsibilities. Between 1996 to 2018 local government suffered a 44% decrease in Financial Assistance Grants; collected only 3.6% of taxes across the 3 tiers of government, while simultaneously dealing with a 340% increase in expenditure;
- This imbalance in funding is placing increasing pressure on local government to adequately support its cultural institutions;
- The financial implications of the COVID-19 situation will be adding to this pressure;
- Regional galleries, like libraries, play a crucial role in community wellbeing, delivering access programs for audiences living with a disability, cultural projects for young people, and supporting Aboriginal artists and community through cultural sharing. It is vital that these roles do not get diminished with reduced capacity to adequately deliver.

RECOMMENDATION:
- **RPGNSW is recommending an Annual Operational Subsidy to local government operated regional art galleries from the NSW Government commensurate with a successful Create NSW Annual or Multi Year Program application. This is similar to the mechanisms of support offered to the public library system.**

(ii) **Whether there is equitable access to collections across NSW, including at the Powerhouse Museum and the Australian Museum.**
- Some major collecting institutions have better accessibility systems than others;
- Often this accessibility can be down to the drive and initiative of individual staff members;
- Art Gallery of NSW (an RPGNSW) member has been working steadily over the past few years to facilitate more loans for regional galleries;
- More flexibility is needed around types of objects that could be borrowed under less stringent environmental/security conditions

(iii) **The continuing impact of the efficiency dividend on the budgets of museums and galleries over the last 10 years.**
- Efficiency dividends apply to major institutions only, but its impact flows down to the small to medium public gallery sector;
- The importance of well-resourced major institutions to smaller galleries is their ability to tour artworks from their collections to regional centres, and support smaller venues in other professional development roles;
- The efficiency dividend restricts this if the major institutions are not well resourced;
- A caveat to this is that there needs to be rules around funding to major institutions that requires them to provide enhanced access to their collections and provide services to the regions.

(iv) **Whether there are other more cost-effective strategies than the sale of the Powerhouse Museum site at Ultimo to support museum development across NSW.**
- The cost of moving the Powerhouse to Parramatta will likely absorb the majority of money made from the sale of the Ultimo site;
- It would be surprising if any money from this project filters to the development of museums/galleries across NSW;
- That said, the benefits of a major cultural institution in Parramatta are many and this is well supported by the sector. Consideration of a stand-alone, new cultural facility in Parramatta that is reflective of the multi-cultural, new migrant community together with strong Aboriginal heritage would be a major drawcard for the city and very well received within Western Sydney.