

**Submission
No 40**

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

Organisation: Lake Macquarie City Council

Date Received: 4 May 2020



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The Hon. Robert Borsak MLC
Chair, Select Committee on the Government's management of the
Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New
South Wales
(Submitted online)

Dear Mr Borsak

Subject: Staff submission - Management of museum and cultural projects in New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Select Committee's inquiry into the *Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales*. This submission has been prepared by Lake Macquarie City Council staff, and while we do not provide comments on the management of the Powerhouse Museum, we provide the following in response to other parts of the Inquiry's terms of reference.

Council staff believe the NSW Government's existing policy objectives have been effective to date, however they may need to be reviewed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has had a devastating impact on the cultural sector and recovery efforts should look at innovative policy levers to enable the sector to not only re-establish itself, but for the sector to thrive and become more resilient.

We suggest the Government develops a State-wide Museums and Galleries Strategy to guide a coordinated and collaborative approach to the sector's recovery – a strategy that can be used by public and private institutions alike. The Strategy should, at a minimum, address key areas for growth in the sector, such as infrastructure, digitisation, education, preservation and more.

The Inquiry's terms of reference question whether there is equitable access to collections of the large State institutions. It is difficult to assess equity in the cultural sector when access to these collections, object loan or touring is cost prohibitive or unable to be accessed due to regional facility collection management limitations.

It is the experience of Lake Macquarie City Council that we have been both able and unable to access collections in line with the larger institutions collection policies. The need for considerable infrastructure has inhibited our ability to access collections. The collective experience of Council staff and our relationships with other institutions suggest that it can be even more difficult for regional and rural institutions to access

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more significant State and National collections. This can be for any number of reasons with the main being that there is a lack of collaboration between large institutions and smaller regional and rural institutions, particularly when it comes to gallery climate requirements to protect collections.

To improve the opportunity for regional and rural institutions to access other collections, we suggest the abovementioned Strategy include a framework for the sharing and display of collections, which in turn could:

- improve the ability of lending institutions and borrowing institutions
- revise collection climate control conditions in line with international standards (with the subsequent aim of maximising engagement and understanding)
- lift the overall capabilities of the sector through investment in cultural facilities and professional development opportunities, and
- incentivise innovation in the sector through the display of significant collections (for example, using multiple formats across institutions across a region for the same collection).

There is also a significant opportunity with the future closure and redevelopment of major institutions such as Art Gallery NSW and Powerhouse Museum to enable collections from these institutions to be temporarily relocated to regional cultural facilities while in they are in redevelopment. This would enable improved cultural tourism opportunities for these regional centres, raise the profile of the State's collections, improve regional professional development skills and expand the profile and importance of cultural collections and education to wider audiences.

A lesson we are all learning during the COVID-19 pandemic is that we need to embrace digital technology to increase the accessibility of our cultural collections. We suggest this mindset needs to continue post-pandemic and should seek to balance the need to record historical data with the ability to deliver digital programs and exhibitions. We understand that, in 2018, Museums & Galleries NSW received funding from the NSW Government's Regional Cultural Fund to complete a prototype State-wide collection online portal. More funding to this program could accelerate the digitisation of collections across NSW.

In closing, it is important that I highlight the importance of cultural institutions for our communities. Separate to their ability to attract tourists, museums and galleries offer local communities a place to gather, contemplate, reflect and imagine. We are proud of our institutions and are actively investing in them to improve amenity, offer new and innovative programs, and to offer a creative outlet for people of all ages.

Should you require further information, please contact _____, Council's Manager of Arts, Culture and Tourism, on _____ or _____

Yours sincerely

Morven Cameron
Chief Executive Officer