

Submission
No 82

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

Organisation: Arts Mid North Coast

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Inquiry into NSW Museums & Cultural Projects. 2020

Arts Mid North Coast wishes to make the following submission in relation to the matters detailed in the terms of reference as:

(b) the Government's management of all museums and cultural projects in New South Wales, including:

(i) current Government policy, funding and support for museums and galleries across regional New South Wales,

1. Who are we?

Arts Mid North Coast is the peak regional body for arts and cultural development across the Mid North Coast region of New South Wales, a region of 315,000 residents in the six local government areas of Mid Coast, Port Macquarie Hastings, Kempsey, Nambucca, Bellingen and Coffs Harbour. It embraces the Woromi, Biripi, Dunghutti and Gumbaynggirr Nations. We are part of the network of 14 Regional Arts Development Organisations in regional New South Wales providing considerable experience in strategic planning processes in regional areas. In this we work closely with all galleries and museums in the area and with regional organisations such as the Mid North Coast Chapter of Museums Australia. The focus of this submission is museums in Regional NSW.

2. Our Work with Museums

We take a very expansive view of what is local culture preferring the broader definition based on the definition of cultural tourism of the World Tourism Organisation. Our definition is culture

... embraces a portfolio of information, experiences and activities that people can undertake to understand what makes a place distinctive. It provides everyone (residents and visitors) with an opportunity to understand the essential character and culture of a place: its spirit, identity, heritage, values, diversity, traditions and sense of place... These activities need to be authentic, informed quality cultural experiences to successfully interpret what is unique and special about a place.

As such we have for many years incorporated heritage and museums in all our work even though at a State level all such matters have only fallen within the responsibilities of Create NSW since April 2019. Our expansive view also means that museums and galleries at a local level can be different models of traditional perceptions with these local community initiatives often creating models that reflect their needs and resources rather than urban models. Nevertheless no matter what their form what is indisputable is the contribution they make to our community across not only cultural but social and economic outcomes and benefits. It is therefore with delight we are able to make submissions on this important topic and present a regional perspective.

Our perspective reflects our local context which can be summarised as:

- Our museums are primarily community museums. We have 26 museums in our region <https://artsmidnorthcoast.com/trail/museums-trail/> Those that have paid staff experienced in museums and heritage are the Coffs Harbour Regional Museum and Trial Bay Gaol while

the Glasshouse is a Council facility but with no one dedicated to heritage. All our other museums are community museums with hundreds of passionate and committed volunteers.

- Within the community museums sector there is a wide range of skills and commitment to professional standards. A number have excellent relationships with Museums & Galleries NSW and access their professional training opportunities. Those that do also tend to be more open to working collaboratively with positive outcomes such as the success of the Our Rivers our History project in 2015 where we were fortunate to partner with seven community museums. The project won a 2015 NSW IMAGinE Award and a 2016 Australian MAGNA Award.
- Our 17 Cultural Trails include three for Museums, Places of State Heritage Significance, Heritage Walks and many works in the Public Art Trail inspired by local history and stories.
- A number of our 10 Creative Communities have a strong heritage focus such as Stroud and its colonial heritage and Woolgoolga with its unique Sikh heritage and new museum
- In February 2019, Arts Mid North Coast delivered a Strategic Plan for the Bellingen Historical Museum, the result of months of workshops and consultations with the assistance of a Projects Grant from Museums & Galleries NSW.
- From the Bellingen project we also developed and distributed 13 page Toolkit. Marketing Your Museum, Ideas to Increase Visitation and Engagement for Small Museums.
- In 2019 we partnered with Port Macquarie Museum to develop online exhibition, Tourists Paradise to not only increase awareness and visitation to the Museum but use by the tourism industry.
- In 2019 we produced the region wide festival, *SHINE...shining a light on our museums and rich heritage*. The Festival was developed to be much more than a marketing campaign but a way to build capacity and show Museums different ways of how they could present themselves to attract new and different audiences. Arts Mid North Coast worked with them to develop an exciting range of events within their volunteer resources. The Festival from April 22 to 29 presented 28 special events while other online features about the heritage of the region were also showcased. The latter focused on smaller museums and heritage sites that did not have the resources to present major events.
- SHINE was to be presented in again (with different events and stories) in April 2020 but was postponed due to COVID 19. A rescheduled date in September during NSW History Week is hoped for.

3.Submission - Future Directions

Our focus in this submission is primarily on museums for they are the keepers of our rich heritage and have incredible potential to tell our stories. Community galleries play a very important part in showcasing local artists but generally are less likely to have a collection. Nevertheless many of the comments as to infrastructure and training apply equally to galleries in smaller regional communities.

Key Requests.

- Increase the whole of government funding and services for regional museums and galleries whether this be through of Museums & Galleries NSW or some other appropriate body that may come out of the this review and its recommendations.
- Ensure assistance for recovery programs post COVID 19. With 90 % of our musuems being community run they have now had no income from admissions (their primary source of income) for over 2 months
- Improve the standard of cultural facilities in community museums and galleries including better storage and the development of temporary exhibition spaces. The latter should include innovative ways of using spaces differently.
- Encourage local government investment in museums and collections, and storytelling around distinctive local themes, places and histories in rural and regional communities. There is a tendency for many of the Museums just to collect and tell stories that are common to many areas.
- Encourage the employment of trained curators in rural and regional NSW, which is hard to achieve in current environment where councils don't want to take on new positions or responsibilities. Positions could be shared across Councils or be an expansions of the Museums Advisors and/or Heritage Advisors programs.
- Support the development of multipurpose cultural facilities in small rural communities to include potentially museums, archives, library, tourism, art and craft groups and other appropriate facilities.
- Foster collaboration and regional networks so museums and galleries learn from each other and work together on collection, tourism and audience development projects
- Provide incentives for local government to plan for and support networks of community museums in their LGA
- Share distinctive local stories and collections on line in initiatives aimed and supporting exploration of museums and heritage places, discovery of local stories and encouraging schools to use local museums and collections

Capital Grants

- Provide for dedicated capital grants to local government for small rural communities to plan/ build multipurpose cultural facilities. Priority given to the projects that rehouse museums and collections in high quality facilities, and that include a multi-use exhibition space for changing local displays, and to take small scale travelling exhibitions and shows.
- Capital grants to larger local councils for the development of new museums /galleries in cultural precincts. Such precincts should be consistent with policies on cultural precincts and creative hubs. Where the building is for museum purposes it should be a requirement that any such regional museum includes a plan to work with community museums and collections throughout the LGA. Grants would be conditional on the employment by the Council of paid trained museum professionals early in the project development, and other criteria.

Not Just Buildings

- Provide funding for Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) and site masterplans for museums in heritage buildings, with follow up funding for conservation and new works

- Provide capital grants to help museums design and build new storage and archives, to cover firstly collection assessment and deaccessioning (or decluttering), scope, design and cost new space/facility, and build.
- Collections networking grants to engage museum professionals to work with regional networks of museums on important collection themes and local stories, along the lines of *Our Rivers Our History* <http://www.oroh.com.au/>
- Incentives to newly amalgamated councils in regional NSW to prepare an integrated strategic plan for all the museums in their new LGA, with additional funding once the plan is adopted in council's community plan and forward budget.

Further Detail

Exhibitions/displays

A number of community museums have tired and old exhibitions that have not changed much in decades. So many community museums tell the same stories e.g. timber, farming etc. They need to find what different and what visitors will be interested in or else they end up looking like a curio shop. Grants should be available which would allow community museums to engage a professional curator and exhibition designer to help them plan and produce new exhibitions that are focussed on interpreting the distinctive stories of their village, town or locality, encouraging visitors to explore the region.

The grant could be in two stages depending on the museum, year one to develop a new exhibition plan for renew the museum's exhibitions, and year 2, to design and develop a new orientation exhibition about the place and its local stories. This would raise the standard of presentation in the museums and give volunteers the experience of working with professional design and curatorial skills.

Case Study Bellingen

The study we undertook with Bellingen Museum and its volunteers reflected the above being a museum with lots in the collection from 100 years ago. However when challenged the volunteers on being asked what do most visitors know about Bellingen identified an alternative lifestyle and great arts and music festivals. That history from the 1960's onwards was nowhere to be seen in the museum although it turned out there was material in its collection in storage. Identifying this need has seen the potential for a whole new display and one through festivals etc. will link the museum to event organisers and the tourism market. It has also attracted new volunteers and potential for events such as the SOLD OUT Hippie Tour of the Town that was staged during the 2019 SHINE Festival.

Education

Funding for museums and galleries to engage qualified education specialists to develop curriculum linked education materials for use by local schools, based around objects and stories in the collection, and to work with schools and museums on developing digital stories from the collections, where the students are the content producers. Again what we have found is that simple Education programs can later convert into School holiday activities to attract families and visitors and also in some cases programs that can provide a further income source. Again such diversification also needs

and attracts a different kind of volunteer which broadens a focus to public role rather than traditional research and collection focus.

Training

Based on success in our region we would argue that new regional museum networks be created as the base for training and development. The museum networks would meet regularly for training and planning and be encouraged to develop collaborative projects. The networks could be supported with small \$10,000 pa grants paid to suitable community museums to act as the anchor and co-ordinator. The funding could cover some funding to host and pay for training and workshops and planning events, and to engage experienced people to help them with grant applications. The networks could be affiliated with regional arts boards and / or grow from the Museums Australia chapter network.

4.Economic Rationale for Reform

While we note that museums are vital for communities to preserve and tell their stories it is also important to note the economic value they can contribute to local tourism. We believe we are very well placed to comment on such matters as the most active Regional Arts Development Organisation in NSW the area of cultural tourism with proven outcomes across a number of projects and Tourism Industry Awards for the last 4 years.

World Organisations

The World Tourism Organisation indicates more than 50% of global tourism is motivated by a desire to experience culture and heritage. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) notes:

Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing global tourism markets. Culture and creative industries are increasingly being used to promote destinations and enhance their competitiveness and attractiveness. Many locations are now actively developing their tangible and intangible cultural assets as a means of developing comparative advantages in an increasingly competitive tourism marketplace, and to create local distinctiveness in the face of globalisation

Destination New South Wales

DNSW recognises the importance of the cultural tourism market and now produces an annual Snapshot of Cultural & Heritage Tourism. It is a very important market because it drives yield. The latest 2019 Snapshot on 2018 figures indicates

Cultural and heritage visitors stayed 87.0 million nights and spent \$14.0 billion in NSW. International visitors stayed longer than Domestic overnight visitors in terms of average length of stay and hence, the average spend per visitor for International visitors were almost 3x that of Domestic overnight visitors. In terms of average spend per night, however, Domestic overnight culture and heritage based visitors spent much more per night than their International counterparts

<https://www.destinationnsw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/cultural-and-heritage-tourism-to-nsw-snapshot-ye-de-2018.pdf>

More important for this submission

'Visit history/heritage buildings, sites or monuments' was the most common cultural and heritage activity undertaken by all visitors to NSW. .. 'Visit museums or art galleries' was second most popular activity undertaken in the State

For domestic tourists in regional NSW domestic cultural tourists stayed more nights compared to other travellers. Other characteristics include the high percentage that are aged 50 to 69; that they travel as an adult couple and that females are the greatest visitors to cultural experiences These figures are further confirmed by the findings of the 2015 Museums & Galleries NSW research, Guess who is Going to the Museum which added to the research from their 2011 study on Art Galleries. These characteristics all correlate strongly to the main markets of the Mid North Coast and indeed Regional NSW especially to the wanderers or grey nomads markets with one third of these also classified by accommodation used as the Visiting Friends and Relatives market. There is also a strong correlation to the traditional family market where they are increasingly seeking authentic and different experiences.

Australia Council Research. Domestic Arts Tourism

In early 2020 the Australia Council released a study on the importance of Domestic Arts Tourism in Regional Australia. This 88 page supplemented an earlier study on International Arts Tourism and it further strengthens the case for recognising the economic benefit on spending on cultural projects.<https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/domestic-arts-tourism-connecting-the-country/>

Key insights of the Domestic Arts Tourism report include:

- Domestic arts tourism is growing: Greater numbers of Australians are travelling than ever before. Along with population growth and overall growth in domestic tourism, the numbers of Australians engaging with the arts while exploring their own country are growing.
- There are unique offerings in different parts of Australia: There is no one-size-fits all for arts engagement on a domestic trip – Australians connect with the arts in a broad range of ways. The most popular and fastest-growing arts tourism activities vary across the country. Each state, territory and region offers unique arts and creative experiences, and this is reflected in the data.
- Arts tourism tends to align with travelling further, staying longer and spending more: Arts tourists are high value tourists – they are more likely to stay longer and spend more when travelling than domestic tourists overall. Australians are more likely to engage with the arts when they travel further afield – those who take overnight trips rather than daytrips, and those who travel outside their home state. The areas where tourists are most likely to engage with the arts are often outside the large east coast capital cities.

**Executive Director
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