

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

POWERHOUSE MUSEUM

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

CORRECTED

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, on Wednesday 2 September 2020

The Committee met at 9:30

PRESENT

The Hon. Robert Borsak (Chair)

The Hon. Ben Franklin

The Hon. Rose Jackson

The Hon. Trevor Khan

The Hon. Taylor Martin

The Hon. Walt Secord

Mr David Shoebridge (Deputy Chair)

The CHAIR: Welcome to the third hearing of the Select Committee Inquiry into the Government's Management of the Powerhouse Museum and Other Museums and Cultural Projects in New South Wales. The inquiry is examining issues surrounding the Government's proposal for the Powerhouse Museum and support for the State's museums and cultural sector more broadly. Before I commence, I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders past and present of the Eora nation, and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present.

Today we will turn our attention to the issues faced by the State's museums and galleries sector more broadly, hearing evidence from the sector's peak bodies and associations, local government organisations, and regional museums and galleries. Before we commence, I would like to make some brief comments about the procedures for today's hearing. Today's hearing is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. A transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available.

In accordance with broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside of their evidence at the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments you may make to the media or to others after you complete your evidence, as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take any action under defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

All witnesses have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. I remind everyone here today that Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections about others under the protection of parliamentary privilege. I therefore request that witnesses focus on the issues raised by the inquiry terms of reference and avoid naming individuals unnecessarily. Witnesses are advised that any messages should be delivered to the Committee members through the Committee staff. To aid the audibility of the hearing, may I remind both Committee members and witnesses to speak into the microphones. The room is fitted with induction loops compatible with hearing aid systems that have telecoil receivers.

KATE FOY, Deputy Secretary, Community Engagement, Department of Premier and Cabinet, on former affirmation

ANNETTE PITMAN, Head of Create Infrastructure, Create NSW, Department of Premier and Cabinet, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Pitman, would you like to make a short opening statement?

Ms PITMAN: Yes, please.

The CHAIR: Please proceed.

Ms PITMAN: I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to be here today to provide a greater understanding of the New South Wales Government's current cultural projects. Create NSW is the lead arts agency in the New South Wales Government. It undertakes a broad range of activities designated to promote a thriving arts and culture offering for the people of New South Wales. Create NSW has an unprecedented and exciting capital infrastructure portfolio, Create Infrastructure, which I lead. We are responsible for ensuring the delivery of over \$2 billion of new and renewed cultural facilities. Our diverse portfolio of projects includes the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct, the Powerhouse museums, Sydney Modern and the Australian Museum, among many others.

Create Infrastructure administers the \$100 million Regional Cultural Fund, which has funded 136 projects from all regions of New South Wales of which 42 are regional museums and galleries. We work closely with many partners including end user arts organisations, our clients, Infrastructure NSW as delivery agent, local governments, and other public and private stakeholders. Arts and culture enable lifelong learning, bring communities together, support the visitor economy and activate our civic spaces. They competitively position our State to attract investment, talent and visitors; build liveable communities; and enhance individual wellbeing.

Cultural infrastructure plays an increasingly important role in attracting visitors to New South Wales with cultural visitors more likely to stay longer and spend more than other visitors. Our cultural facilities contribute to global recognition of New South Wales as a flagship State for the arts and culture. Create Infrastructure was established in 2017 to advise the Government on cultural infrastructure strategy and development, and to oversee the delivery of cultural infrastructure projects. Following significant research and consultation, Create NSW issued the Cultural Infrastructure Plan in 2019. This plan is our guiding strategy, underpinning the once-in-a-generation renewal of arts and cultural infrastructure across New South Wales that we are currently overseeing.

Create Infrastructure is made up of a small group of industry professionals who have experience in all aspects of cultural project development, delivery, operation and maintenance nationally and internationally. We are proud of the work we do delivering important infrastructure in communities across New South Wales. Because we understand this hearing will focus on museums and galleries outside of Sydney, I would like to offer a few examples of the projects that were funded through the Regional Cultural Fund [RCF].

Many RCF projects enhance the functionality of existing infrastructure enabling a broader range of programming to occur, improving sustainability through greater revenue generation, and increasing opportunities for educational programs and youth engagement due to availability of state-of-the-art technical equipment and improved facilities. The funds support projects ranging from the construction of major new exhibition and performing arts spaces through to refurbishment of libraries, theatres and museums and small, grassroots community projects.

In Kyogle the Regional Cultural Fund funded the historical society to fit out a new museum with a computer room, storage and exhibitions. The entirely volunteer-run museum can now accommodate school groups. This project is now complete. The Land of the Beardies museum in Glen Innes was funded to install a fireproof store, and sadly, recent fires came devastatingly close to the township. This new facility will provide protection for the community's valuable museum collection in future fire emergencies. Bundanon, near Nowra, holds the bequest of the late Arthur Boyd.

Government committed \$8.5 million in RCF money to realise the Bundanon Trust's Riversdale masterplan. The project will make huge improvements to the site, including fireproofing, and enhance Bundanon as a significant economic driver for the region. Subsequent to the State Government's commitment, the Federal Government granted an additional \$22 million to realise the project. I am pleased to report that 58 of the 136 projects funded through the Regional Cultural Fund are now complete and operational. Finally, I would like to

acknowledge the valuable partnerships we have with local governments and community organisations without whom these important projects would not happen. I once again thank the Committee for its time.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Pitman, how long have you been with Create NSW?

Ms PITMAN: I joined Create NSW in March 2019 and I assumed the role as the of head of Create Infrastructure in August 2019.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Where were you before March 2019?

Ms PITMAN: My career has been built on creating cultural and sporting infrastructure predominantly. I spent nearly 10 years in State Government in Victoria leading a series of government projects there, including the Hamer Hall redevelopment and Arts Centre, and the tennis centre redevelopment. I left for a period of time and went into consulting, and now I have left the private sector to come back to government.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: In your opening statement, you mentioned that you are in charge of a portfolio of \$2 billion involving Walsh Bay, the Powerhouse, Sydney Modern and the Australian Museum. Can you give me the breakdown of that \$2 billion?

Ms PITMAN: I would have to take that on notice, but I can give you the full details, yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: In your opening statement you mentioned the Regional Cultural Fund [RCF].

Ms PITMAN: Mm-hm.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You introduced that in your opening statement. Thank you for doing that, because you have given me an opportunity to ask you some questions about that. How are those projects selected for approval?

Ms FOY: We just need to refer to our notes, Mr Secord.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I can see where this is going.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: She introduced it.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: No, it is within the terms of reference. It clearly is the cultural fund.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Yes, and I remind you that she introduced it herself.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You do not need to. I can see where this line of questioning is going.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You will know in a few minutes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I know now.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Let us see if Ms Pitman can help me explore my line of questioning.

Ms FOY: I might pick up some of that and then ask Ms Pitman to take on some of the detail, if that is all right, Mr Secord. Some of these things have pre-dated us, so we just need to make sure that we are referring to our records. In 2018, the RCF's \$100 million program supported around 136 projects. Given that this is an inquiry on galleries and museums, I just wanted to give an idea about that: \$42 million was allocated to 42 museum and gallery projects. The process involves a number of panels. There is a panel process involving public sector employees as well as independent people, both as chairs and/or as members. We made sure that we had a probity framework that sat around that and that we draw on the probity principles from three areas: the Department of Premier and Cabinet [DPC]; the *Good Practice Guide to Grants Administration*—for the record, that is a 2010 publication; and the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption's report *Managing conflicts of interest in the public sector*, which is a 2012 publication.

At the time, Create was in the Department of Planning and Environment, so it complied with the Department of Planning and Environment's Code of Ethics and Conduct for employees; and the administration of the RCF grant is consistent with the Australian National Audit Office's better practice guide for grants administration—a 2013 publication. So the applications to the RCF were assessed by an independent panel established for each funding round. It had representatives with regional expertise from across the arts and cultural sector and the infrastructure industry and, as I said before, public servants from government. There were four program criteria: case for change, capacity to deliver, value for money, and engagement and reach. Those applications were assessed by the panel against those criteria based on the information that was provided, and then that assessment—that advice—was provided to government for decision.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Can I stop you there? You mentioned a probity framework involving DPC, the good practice guide of 2010, and ICAC. Do you say that all 136 projects were approved according to proper probity and ICAC procedures?

Ms FOY: My understanding is that all of the projects that were put forward were eligible for funding against the criteria.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Are you aware that seven projects were submitted to the program after the deadline and were accepted for consideration after the deadline, which contravenes common good practice?

Ms FOY: My understanding is the probity framework allowed for a decision to be made by, I believe, the appropriate executive inside Create. There was an allowance for a decision to be made to accept late—

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Who made the decision?

Ms FOY: I would have to refer that.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Can you take that on notice and provide the full name and title of the person?

Ms FOY: I am very happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Are you familiar with those seven projects that missed the deadline but were accepted?

Ms FOY: No, Mr Secord, I am not.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Is it normal in these grant processes to have projects submitted after the deadline?

Ms FOY: There can be quite legitimate reasons for projects to be submitted late. I do not know how late—you know, was it 30 minutes or an hour or whatever? It is not unusual. There can be things that are outside of people's control that require us to look at each on a case-by-case basis, whether there were technical issues et cetera.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Do you record that information as to how late they are submitted? I agree with you; there is a difference between 30 minutes and three weeks.

Ms FOY: Yes, I would expect that that would be recorded and the decision-making—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Would there be a problem with three weeks?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Yes, there would be a problem.

Ms FOY: I would expect that that would be recorded, yes. Whether it has been, I would have to check.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Would you be able to?

Ms FOY: Of course.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I do not expect you to have this information with you today, Ms Foy, but would you be able to take on notice how far after the deadline those projects were submitted?

Ms FOY: I would be happy to.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Would you know off the top of your head—either yourself or, perhaps, Ms Pitman—whether representatives from the department contacted those organisations to solicit or encourage them to make applications, or whether they came up with the idea on their own but, for whatever reason, they just happened to miss the deadline? Were they proactively encouraged and told, "Why don't you make an application to this fund"?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: To assist the Hon. Rose Jackson and make it easier for you when you take that on notice, could I nominate the seven projects that I would like the answer to relate to?

Ms FOY: Yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: They are the Spiral Gallery in the electorate of Bega; Bourke arts council in Bourke, in the electorate of Barwon; Manning Entertainment Centre, MidCoast Council, Myall Lakes; Wired Lab in Cootamundra—

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Point of order: I have been listening very closely to the Hon. Walt Secord and he had been within the terms of reference, which are very specifically about galleries and museums. I presume the term of reference that his question falls under is (b) (i), which states:

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

That is fine when we are talking about museums and galleries, but the Hon. Walt Secord is now straying into other projects that are not directly related to—

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Mr Chair—

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Could I please finish my sentence?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I apologise; I thought you were done. It was that soft voice of yours.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I know—soft and mellifluous.

The CHAIR: Order! I would not go that far.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I respectfully suggest, Mr Chair, that while I understand where the Hon. Walt Secord is going, there is a danger that it now broadens to such a degree that it is actually outside the terms of reference of this inquiry.

The CHAIR: I will entertain the question, but I will wait for the answer to see whether it does broaden to the point where it is outside the terms of reference.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: The title of this inquiry is "on the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales". In fact, even the title of this Committee relates to the questions I am asking. I only have two more facilities that I would like the witness—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Could I address that?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: It is very clear that it is within the terms of reference and, in fact, the title of this inquiry.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Whatever one can say about the title of the inquiry, if one is looking to what is within or without the terms of reference, one actually goes to the terms of reference and not to a title. I am fairly relaxed about this; this is obviously starting to be a broader exercise but I actually support my friend that, really, there is a limit to how far we can stray.

The CHAIR: If you keep straying, you will not have any friends.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I will let you in on a secret: It is a pretty defined group now.

The CHAIR: We will see whether the Hon. Walt Secord does actually stray far enough to lose all his friends.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Foy and Ms Pitman, the last three are Merimbula Old School Museum in Bega; Sommer O'Brien, Warrumbungle Shire Council; and Artist Tree Studios. The reason I ask about those seven projects is that they missed the deadline. Four of them were approved. Are you familiar with a legal firm called Clayton Utz?

Ms FOY: Yes.

Ms PITMAN: Yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: What is their role as a probity adviser involving this program?

Ms FOY: They were the appointed probity adviser to the program and I understand that there was a nominated person from the company that was working closely with each of the panels.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Are you aware that they expressed concern that four of those projects in the electorates of Bega, Barwon, Myall Lakes and Cootamundra—are you familiar that they wrote a letter expressing concern that the projects were receiving funding after the deadline and after guidelines set up by the Australian National Audit Office [ANAO]?

Ms FOY: I am not aware of that particular advice but I am happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Does a public official or a panel have a responsibility if they approve a project that misses a deadline against the express wishes or concerns? Are there ramifications to a bureaucrat doing that?

Ms FOY: If I may go back to your first comment, the Ministers in government-approved projects—panels and bureaucrats provide advice to elected officials who are there to make those decisions. My understanding in reviewing some of the information is that all 136 of the projects that were funded were eligible for funding and demonstrated their capacity to meet the assessment criteria and would provide both a social and economic benefit. The role of the panels—obviously, we have guidelines that govern how bureaucrats work. We have probity frameworks that govern how projects are administered and we provide advice to the Government for those Ministers to make particular decisions.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Foy, can you then tell me—and take this on notice if you are unable to—of the 136 projects approved, how many were recommended by the panel and then how many were recommended by Minister Harwin or the Deputy Premier or the transport Minister and member for Bega or the member for Myall Lakes and Parliamentary Secretary, Stephen Bromhead, or lastly, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier and member from Cootamundra, Steph Cook? Of the 136, how many were approved by the independent panels comprising the bureaucrats and the public servants and how many were approved by political masters or Ministers?

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Point of order: Again my point is to the actual relevance to the terms of reference. This would be a relevant question when talking about those projects that were museums and galleries that receive funding under the Regional Cultural Fund but to throw this net so broadly is well outside of the terms of reference.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Pitman said in her opening statement that she had responsibility for a \$2 billion infrastructure program and the Regional Cultural Fund. This is entirely within that and relates to our terms of reference. She actually introduced the program herself in her opening statement.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Indeed.

The CHAIR: What part of that are you quibbling with?

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: The fact that she referred to the Regional Cultural Fund. Because she referred to the 40-odd gallery and museums that were funded under the Regional Cultural Fund—just because she said three words does not mean we are able to actually look at every single thing that comes under those three words. She also said the word "government". That does not mean that we can now look at icare.

The CHAIR: That is right.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: She made it a centrepiece of her opening statement that she had responsibility—

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: She did and she talked about the regional museums and galleries that were funded under the Regional Cultural Fund. That is exactly what the transcript said and I ask for confirmation from the witness.

Ms FOY: Of the 136 projects, all were deemed as being eligible for funding. Forty-two of those related to museums and galleries. Of the \$100 million, those 42 museum and gallery projects coincidentally received \$42 million, which makes it easy to remember. We are obviously happy in the hands of the Committee to take on notice any of those projects that are relevant to the terms of reference.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I spelt them out. I am nearing the end of my questioning but I do want to point out—I took copious notes during her opening statement—that she actually drilled down herself and then provided individual examples of those 42 museums, including Glen Innes and Kyogle. So she introduced—

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: She, indeed, talked about those specific 42.

The CHAIR: Order! Can we just focus on the questioning and drill down as much as we need to.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Pitman, thank you for introducing that. I am looking forward to getting those answers back on notice. Now I will turn to the Powerhouse Museum.

The CHAIR: Can I ask a question before you go away from program funding grants for museums?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Sorry, yes.

The CHAIR: I am not sure whether I should direct this to Ms Foy or Ms Pitman.

Ms FOY: I am happy to indicate.

The CHAIR: Museums funded under the program grant funding category include Hawkesbury Regional Museum, which received \$105,000, and Orange Regional Museum, which received \$80,000.

Ms PITMAN: May I ask if you are referring to the Regional Cultural Fund projects?

The CHAIR: Yes. What I am pointing out is that the programs for the regional museums total \$305,000 out of a total of \$18-odd million—1.68 per cent. Is there any reason why that percentage should be so low?

Ms FOY: I couldn't answer that question. Could you repeat what those museums and galleries were?

The CHAIR: Yes. Hawkesbury Regional Museum and Hawkesbury Regional Gallery received \$105,000; Orange Regional Museum, \$80,000—good local member there—Museum of the Riverina, \$75,000—another good local member. Albury Library Museum was not so good: \$45,000. In total, it is \$305,000 out of \$18-odd million.

Ms FOY: I would need to check on what the original bid was from those museums and what the inputs were to require or to have that result of funding, but I am very happy to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Yes. If you could take that on notice for me that would be good.

Ms FOY: Of course.

The CHAIR: I notice that, turning to the project grants category, only one regional partnership was granted some money and that was the Albury City Council: \$74,000 out of a total project grant funding of about \$5.9 million. Again, it is only 1.25 per cent of the total. Is there some explanation of the criteria that refined it down to that?

Ms FOY: Certainly.

The CHAIR: And the professional development support grants, we are talking about \$1.3 million but there was nothing given to museum creators or funding for museum creators as such.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Curators?

The CHAIR: Curators. Yes, there was nothing given for the professional development of those people. Again, out of that \$1.3 million or \$1.8 million, what was it turned to? Strategic funding grants. Zero museums were funded. Obviously the percentage of the grant of \$4.128 million was also zero. Can I get some more detail on that please?

Ms FOY: Very happy to. Certainly, it is worth saying that obviously we had for our projects a lot of interest and many submissions were made. I will go and come back with some detail on each of those for you.

The CHAIR: The reason I am focusing in on that is because the total 2018-19 arts and cultural grant funding was \$56.2 million, of which the total funding for regional museums is only \$305,000. Some 0.67 per cent of the total amount of arts and cultural funding actually went to the bush.

Ms FOY: Of course. I am happy to take that on notice and incorporate any other information about—maybe not through that grant fund—other grant funds that are providing funding to regional areas.

The CHAIR: If you could elucidate if there is other money going from another fund to supply for similar purposes I would be interested.

Ms FOY: Of course. Certainly, say, for example through libraries. I apologise. I do not have the figure off the top of my head. There is quite a significant amount going to libraries in regional New South Wales and that has been announced certainly over the last 12 months. My understanding is it is the biggest investment in regional libraries in a very, very long time.

The CHAIR: We are not talking about libraries, we are talking about regional museums and galleries.

Ms FOY: Apologies. I am happy to take that one on.

The CHAIR: Point of order—

Ms FOY: I withdraw that, Chair.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Have you noticed that there have been no points of order called on you, Mr Chair, because your question was smack on within the terms of reference? I am very fond of you, Mr Chair.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I understand that the figure bandied around is \$840 million for the Powerhouse Museum. What is the current budget at this stage?

Ms PITMAN: The total cost to government for the Powerhouse Museum and the Museums Discovery Centre is \$840 million.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: When you say total cost to government, does that involve offsets, selling land, airspace, things like that?

Ms PITMAN: No. The announcement made on 4 July this year removed the requirement to sell any property to fund the project.

The CHAIR: Did you say \$840 million?

Ms PITMAN: That is correct.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: When will we see the final business case?

Ms PITMAN: It will be done by the end of the year.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: What is the cost of the business case?

Ms PITMAN: The budget for the business case is \$5 million.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Foy, when did you hear about the 4 July announcement?

Ms FOY: I think that we discussed this last time. My answer remains the same.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You are a professional.

Ms FOY: I am afraid that the truth always remains the same.

The CHAIR: What is the answer?

Ms FOY: On 3 July, the day before.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Pitman, when did you find out about the decision? Because you are in charge of Create Infrastructure, Create NSW.

Ms PITMAN: On 3 July.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: In relation to the development of the new business case, have any parameters been provided to you by Government regarding additional funding that might become available for options outside of the business case or are you expressly constrained by the current funding envelope?

Ms PITMAN: I am not sure I fully understand the question.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The current cost to government is \$840 million but the final business case has not yet been developed. Could there be options coming out of the business case that require additional funding or have you been expressly directed to avoid that outcome?

Ms PITMAN: We have not been directed to avoid the outcome of a potential cost. As is normal with a business case, you look at multiple options for the future of a site. The Ultimo site is very important to that part of the city. We have been asked to look at a number of potential items on the site but the announcement on 4 July made it clear that the Powerhouse Museum will remain. That is the centrepiece of the business case that we are developing.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Is the sale of the Harwood Building an option that is canvassed in the business case?

Ms PITMAN: We are not canvassing any options that look at selling properties.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Is it possible that there are options in the business case that require additional funding from government in order to meet that particular outcome?

Ms FOY: It would probably be a bit early to go through that detail. We are still in the process of completing the work. As part of that we are talking with relevant stakeholders, including the City of Sydney. The Ultimo site, as we previously talked about, is a very important and complex site, with different bits and pieces. I think that I talked last time about the constraints of the Harwood Building. We have a heritage part of the site. We have the Wran Building. It is proximate to Central Station, the goods line, and Ultimo and Pyrmont. We want to make sure that it suits where it sits in the precinct.

The Government has—and this has been talked about by the Minister, and I refer to his evidence last time—the desire for an option that looks at a lyric theatre and for creative industries to be part of the precinct.

There is a commitment that the Powerhouse remains at the site. We are looking at the addition of a fashion and design museum capability on the site and the retention of those very large objects. All of those pieces are moving together and we are consulting with a number of stakeholders as part of that process. It is too early to make any decisions one way or the other about investment. That would be a matter for us to advise the Government.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: When you say that your understanding is that the Government's intention is for the powerhouse to remain at the site—

Ms FOY: It is a commitment.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes. But what exactly does that mean to you? What is the baseline for the Powerhouse remaining? Is it literally the sign that says "Powerhouse Museum" and the three large objects? What is your understanding of the extent of that commitment?

Ms FOY: There is the retention of the Powerhouse Museum. Lisa Havilah, the chief executive, is working through what that will look like inside, with obviously the very large objects as well as a fashion and design capability included. There would be a range of other exhibitions as part of that. That is what we are working through with her excellent curatorial team. We are also working with a range of other stakeholders and curators to talk about these issues. I would not want to constrain that by saying, "Oh, no, we are only looking at the large objects and fashion and so on." It is a proper world-class museum that will have a range of exhibitions, as it has in the past and as it will in the future.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Foy, you mentioned the retention of the large objects at the Powerhouse Ultimo site. Ms Pitman, what is the status of the community desire to have the Maudslay steam engine go to Goulburn?

Ms PITMAN: That is a matter for the Powerhouse. I am not directly involved in that. I understand that from time to time the Powerhouse loans components of its collection out to regional museums.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I understand that it is quite a large object, so you must have costings and funding taken into consideration. I think I read in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that it would cost \$400,000 to lift it out of the museum.

Ms FOY: We do not have that detail. I am very happy to take that on notice and seek advice from the museum. I tend not to take costing advice from *The Sydney Morning Herald* but I am very happy to get that detail to you. Certainly a lot of our museums—part of the role of a museum is actually about providing a really fantastic audience experience. The Powerhouse works not only with regional areas but around the world when sharing their exhibitions. The Australian Museum dinosaur exhibition has travelled. We are very proud that the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences [MAAS], the Powerhouse Museum, has discussions with regional places so that they can enjoy those objects. The preservation and care of those objects is at the core of the museum and trustees' responsibilities. We are expecting them to, and we know that they do, take that responsibility terribly seriously. The movement of a large object would be a very complex process. Obviously that movement—so that people in regional areas can enjoy those objects—is a very good thing.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Thank you so much for appearing before the Committee. Yesterday I had the privilege of launching one of the Regional Cultural Fund projects, which was Coffs Collections.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Did that meet the criteria?

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Yes, it was excellent. It was about the digitisation of a range of pieces, including all of the pieces in the museum and the gallery at Coffs Harbour. There was so much positive discussion about that, not just because people in Coffs Harbour could look at everything online but also because, more broadly, people across the country and around the world could too. It got us discussing the importance of digitisation for regional communities as well as for exhibitions and collections within Sydney to ensure equity of access for regional people. My question is about digitisation: What are the Government and Create NSW doing to have a real focus on this and increase it?

Ms PITMAN: The Coffs Harbour website that went live just recently is a really fantastic opportunity to see the breadth of the collection that they have, especially in this time where unfortunately the access to physically go and see these items is limited due to COVID. It is a really wonderful opportunity to have to still be able to engage with those objects. The Regional Cultural Fund has been coordinating a digitisation program for regional galleries and museums. We have worked very closely with Museums and Galleries of NSW in the development of that and with the individual end user galleries as well. We have allocated \$5 million for this exercise and 11 local collections have been provided with funding for that. In addition we are in the process of developing what you would call a hub-and-spoke model for enabling regional galleries to leverage a hub which

has the equipment that they need in order to digitise their items and training around that digitisation process, as well as an online platform for them to use to showcase their items.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: To be clear, you are providing that to the regional galleries?

Ms PITMAN: We will be, yes.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Great. What is the time frame for that?

Ms PITMAN: I would have to take that on notice to give you a specific answer.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: That is great. Is that for regional museums as well as regional galleries?

Ms PITMAN: Yes.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Will they then communicate with the more local galleries or the community museums and work with them, potentially? Is that what you mean by hub-and-spoke?

Ms PITMAN: Yes. There will be individual nodes, essentially hubs, that will take on some responsibility, have the equipment there, do some training. Then the smaller galleries and museums can leverage that expertise. We are in the process of rolling out that program.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Pitman, what is the status of the Riverside Theatres redevelopment that is connected to the Parramatta Powerhouse?

Ms PITMAN: We have worked with the City of Parramatta to develop a business case for the future of the Riverside Theatres. A draft of that business case was provided to the City of Parramatta Council last year, at the end of 2019. We have been working collaboratively since then with them to put the finishing touches on that business case and that work is ongoing.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Do you have a date for construction to begin on the Parramatta Powerhouse?

Ms PITMAN: For it to begin on the Parramatta Powerhouse?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Yes.

Ms PITMAN: I would have to take that on notice. It will be next year.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Can you be a bit more specific than early next year?

Ms FOY: I hate to be a bureaucrat, but I would like to turn to process. The process is that we are in the planning phase. Submissions have been received and Infrastructure NSW is in the process of responding to the issues raised in the submission. They are taking the lead on delivery. The time frame for those, I think again we talked about last time, so I refer back to the evidence submitted by Mr Draper. Once we are through that planning process we have the Infrastructure NSW [INSW] assurance process that we go through. The pre-construction tenders are submitted to a gateway review process. Following that and the successful completion of that particular gateway we go to market. The market will then come back with their responses that are assessed and through that there will be confirmation on when a start date would be. But we are holding to our time line of being into gateway this year and into market over the subsequent months for construction next year. I cannot give you a precise date. There is quite a bit of process to work through.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: There are four quarters in a year; the first quarter, second quarter, third quarter, fourth quarter.

Ms FOY: I will come back to you. I cannot off the top of my head, but again we are looking to go to market—

Ms PITMAN: End of this year.

Ms FOY: The end of this year, early next year, subject to gateway.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: When you say "to market", what does that mean?

Ms FOY: That means putting a tender to the construction market.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Tender to construction companies at the end of the year?

Ms FOY: I beg your pardon?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You are looking at a tender to construction companies at the end of the year?

Ms FOY: This is a question for INSW and I will need to confirm with them, but my understanding is a time line of through the planning process, a gateway assurance, tender to market, all led by Infrastructure NSW.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Could you take it on notice then? Could you tell me on notice what the current plan is for tender process and construction at this stage?

Ms FOY: Yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You were very clear on a planning process.

Ms FOY: Yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You must have benchmarks and dates set down, which I understand will shift?

Ms FOY: Yes. I am very happy to take that on notice and seek advice from Infrastructure NSW.

The CHAIR: Are there any more questions? No. Thank you very much. I note you have taken some questions on notice. The secretariat will be in contact with you. You have 21 days to respond to those questions.

Ms FOY: We are happy to take 21 days.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

LINDA SCOTT, President, Local Government NSW, affirmed and examined

MICHAEL ROLFE, Chief Executive Officer, Museums and Galleries of NSW, affirmed and examined

PAUL BRINKMAN, President, Regional and Public Galleries NSW, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our next witnesses. Would you like to make a short opening statement?

Mr BRINKMAN: Regional and Public Galleries NSW is proud to represent the public galleries sector at this inquiry and to further expand on our written submission, particularly in relation to section 1(b) of the inquiry's terms of reference. The bushfires closely followed by COVID-19 have dramatically fractured many of our regional communities and in these difficult times we have seen the important role that public galleries play in supporting communities to maintain a sense of place, pride and hope while they rebuild. Galleries are places of refuge, both physical and mental. They are safe places, inspiring places, reflective places and nurturing places. The regional galleries sector of New South Wales represents approximately 121 cultural oases scattered across the State.

The recently released *Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey* provides tangible evidence of the value of the arts to Australians, with 98 per cent of Australians engaged in the arts in 2019. Clearly the arts is ingrained in who we are as a nation and therefore there is a need for the New South Wales State Government to do all it can to support public galleries as a major part of arts infrastructure. This is not a choice, it is an obligation for all levels of government to the many and varied communities across New South Wales. While local governments are increasingly doing the heavy lifting in this space, accounting for more than 46 per cent of the running costs of the sector, the State Government's commitment has dropped to 13 per cent. When is the time, if not now, to start providing significant, valuable and timely support to public galleries in regional areas.

As regional galleries wait for the results of the 2021 Create NSW's Arts and Cultural Funding Program for local government, the sector as a whole is looking for a better, more strategic and nuanced system of support. The sector needs strong leadership from the State Government with a support mechanism that public galleries can rely upon. The system of support for libraries is a sound example of what could be implemented for the regional galleries sector to provide this surety. A legislated per capita subsidy has been in place for libraries since 1939, enabling the libraries sector to flourish across the State. Meanwhile, the arts sector continues to face an ever-changing piecemeal funding landscape, with at best a maximum of three years of funding support. I urge this inquiry to not, yet again, focus its gaze squarely on the Powerhouse Museum and to see that the arts sector across New South Wales is desperately seeking long-term, sustained and reliable support from the State Government in order to meet the needs of communities.

Mr ROLFE: I would like to begin by acknowledging the Gadigal people as the traditional owners of this land and pay my respects to their Elders, past, present and future. Presenting as I am with Local Government NSW and Regional and Public Galleries NSW, I wanted to keep this introduction focused on Museums and Galleries of NSW's [M&G NSW] support for the community museum and Aboriginal cultural centre sectors, and reinforce this submission's support for the Powerhouse Parramatta project and recently announced intention for it to keep operating at the Ultimo site. Local government has much to be proud of in its vision and service delivery across New South Wales, and because of this involvement our regional galleries and equivalent museums are strong in their visioning and community-engagement activities statewide, and have been for over 100 years.

COVID brings to the fore a long-held need for an overarching museum strategy for the State, as it has highlighted, among many things, the extraordinary estimated \$100 million per annum contribution of volunteers right across our sector—now at a risk of being severely diminished. Pre-COVID there was an undeniable case for more recurrent resources for people, skills, knowledge and programs on the ground to support work discussed here. Post-COVID and post-bushfires that argument has become critical. The Aboriginal people of New South Wales know the challenges of dislocation and cultural loss, and it has been intensely humbling for my organisation to work with the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Arts Association [ACHAA] and help its member organisations to reclaim cultural knowledge and ownership. Its work is ongoing and an important part of this conversation. It is perhaps ironic that the urgent concerns we share for settler histories and beyond can learn from the magnitude and impact of Aboriginal people's loss.

As flagged in our submission, the pandemic and climate change have indeed upended things, and while we noticed some impacts there is still a lot to play out in what we see as a long-tail challenge to the sector's cultural knowledge, volunteer involvements, vital collection care, storytelling and audience engagement activities, which

brings me to Powerhouse Parramatta. It is a visionary project, and in saying that I include and commend the recent decision to maintain programming and operations at Ultimo. Powerhouse Parramatta will invigorate Sydney. In so doing, it will embrace Australia's demographic future and clearly signpost the role of and opportunities presented by cultural institutions in communities throughout New South Wales.

Ms SCOTT: I too would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation on whose land we meet today, and thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear. Local government-run institutions are the backbone of cultural life in our State. For so many of our art, museum and heritage organisations across New South Wales, local government is the primary source of operational funding and also, most commonly, the owner of the buildings in which these organisations operate. We know that of the 377 art, museum and heritage organisations surveyed in 2018, 75 per cent said that local government was their primary source of funding. Of course, councils do not only run museums and galleries. They also own and manage theatres, event spaces, libraries and other public space through which the culture of communities is cultivated, and on which State, Federal and independent touring exhibits and performances rely.

We acknowledge that this inquiry may feed into a nationwide conversation about the role of the creative industry in the recovery of local economies and community wellbeing post-pandemic, and that local government is well placed to drive this locally led recovery. The cultural sector is one of the first industries to largely be put on hold due to public health restrictions limiting gatherings in March. Despite this, funding support from State and Federal governments to local government has so far been very limited. Councils have stepped up to respond to assist local facilities and artists with, for example, a wide range of arts grants and virtual touring. In the post-pandemic recovery it will be vital to provide much greater investment at the local government level to help restore these sectors and the vibrancy that they bring to communities.

This will require three main actions from the New South Wales government. The first is to broaden the funding so that councils can more easily apply for needs other than infrastructure, capital or one-off projects. Councils have told Local Government NSW that funding is lacking for the ongoing facility operations, curatorial development, training and equipment for digitisation and virtual exhibits, and employee costs and retention. Secondly, State and Federally owned institutions should assist by sharing their knowledge and collections across the State through loaning staff and exhibits more freely and fairly. Of course, still valuing local-meaning input to exhibits.

Finally, State and Federal governments should have a renewed strategic focus on arts and cultural projects. At our 2019 local government conference, councils resolved to call on the State Government to develop a New South Wales museum strategy, moved by Councillor Jess Jennings from Bathurst Council. Importantly, councils called for this strategy to be accompanied by sufficient resources to ensure collections and stories are developed and maintained for communities throughout the State. I welcome the focus of this Committee recognising the fundamental importance to communities of arts and cultural development, infrastructure and initiatives and look forward to your questions.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Mr Brinkman, in your submission you state that funding for regional museums and galleries is "competitive". Do you assist or provide advice to regional or public galleries seeking government funding?

Mr BRINKMAN: Certainly. As the peak body for regional galleries, we are on hand to provide advice to anybody looking to apply for any funding, but can I say that the majority of directors across the State are very au fait with applying for grants.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: When you say "au fait", would they recognise the importance of meeting a deadline?

Mr BRINKMAN: Definitely.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Are you familiar with something called the Regional Cultural Fund?

Mr BRINKMAN: Yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You may not have been in the room but previously we have had some evidence from the Create NSW infrastructure person. I put to her that four of seven applications that were submitted after the deadline for the project for the Regional Cultural Fund were approved. Do you advise your members to make submissions after deadlines are closed or do you encourage them to meet the deadlines?

Mr BRINKMAN: Well, that is a practical implication of SmartyGrants, which most grant applications that are applied for go through. My understanding is that you cannot apply after the cut-off date; there is not an opportunity to put an application in for most grant rounds.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Are you saying that because it is an online application process, if you go to submit your grant through the online portal and it is after the application date you cannot upload it?

Mr BRINKMAN: That is how SmartyGrants work, yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You talk about it being very competitive. What do you advise your members if they have a project they want to be funded? Do you encourage them to go through the proper process?

Mr BRINKMAN: Definitely.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: When they are doing that process what advice do you provide to them on providing a case for a grant?

Mr BRINKMAN: There are a number of different grant schemes that are an opportunity that galleries can apply to and each of those different grants often have a different type of focus. So we urge all of our members to—

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Can I take you to the Regional Cultural Fund?

Mr BRINKMAN: Specifically the Regional Cultural Fund?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Yes.

Mr BRINKMAN: I would say that was a fairly generalised fund, so we recommend that all of our members, if they ask us, provide very detailed information of their projects, timelines, budgets are extremely important, and resources that they are able to commit, often in kind, to those kind of projects.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Do they spend a lot of time and effort to lodge an application?

Mr BRINKMAN: Just like every other grant application. Grant applications do require an awful lot of effort and time that goes into application processes, often with fairly limited staffing in these regional spaces to enable that. Often that is the role of senior curators or directors in institutions to put in the applications.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: It occupies a lot of their time when they actually should be engaging in curatorial activities, working with the community, when they have to devote a significant amount of their time and resources to engage in the application process?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Thus it has always been.

Mr BRINKMAN: Certainly.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: But I am just going to the point. In his evidence, he said it was very competitive. I want to make the point that there are procedures that you go through. Forty-two museums and galleries shared \$42 million and of those 42 galleries three were in Liberal Party electorates and they were approved after the deadline. How would your members feel if they had spent time, energy, resources to make an application in good faith, worked very diligently to meet all the criteria—

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Point of order—

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I am asking what is the response from his constituents.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I understand. I am making a point of order. Mr Chair, my point of order is this, I think that this line of question is potentially very unfair. What is happening now is that there is a slight being directed, clearly implied, in fact I would say stated, against these organisations that put in late—

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Freedom of information. It is not a slight; it is in documents right here.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Can I please finish my point? The point is this may be very unfair on these organisations because there may have been a perfectly good reason that they put in late applications. For example, maybe their computer crashed and they put it in 10 minutes after because they had to fax it. I do not know is my point. I do not think that it is appropriate the member continues to say and allege that there was some sort of inappropriate activity by these very hardworking regional organisations. The evidence we have heard today and throughout the inquiry is that they find it tough enough to exist in this space and to have these sorts of allegations is grossly unfair. I ask you to call the member to order and redirect his line of questioning and withdraw those allegations.

The CHAIR: I call the member to order.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Just to give context, would you consider Manning Entertainment Centre to be a tiny cultural organisation? That is a large cultural body. I do not know the answer to this. Is the Manning Entertainment Centre part of your organisation?

Mr BRINKMAN: No, we are regional and public galleries.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Which is the whole reason this Committee is meeting to talk about galleries and museums.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Maybe I will follow that up with freedom of information. Do you find it extraordinary that an entertainment centre is trying to secure funding from a body that should be directed at your members?

Mr BRINKMAN: My understanding is that Manning Art Gallery is a member of our organisation.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Have you had any discussions with the Powerhouse Museum on loaning parts of the Powerhouse collection to rural and regional galleries?

Mr BRINKMAN: Not as an organisation. Individual galleries that will be looking to loan works for particular exhibitions would approach the larger institutions individually.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Are you aware of any approaches at the moment?

Mr BRINKMAN: No.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Mr Rolfe, are you aware of any loaning parts of the Powerhouse Museum gallery to rural and regional galleries?

Mr ROLFE: No, but I am aware that there is a distinct interest from regional New South Wales for collection loans and for object loans and I understand that through commentary from this Committee and in other areas that some approaches have been made for loans from the collection specific to this period of transition. I think it is a great thing. The demand is for object loans and touring exhibitions. It is a wonderful opportunity for regional New South Wales to share in those treasures.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Scott, do your members express concern to you about the amount of time local councils have to divert or extend to government application processes?

Ms SCOTT: They do. They certainly would appreciate more certainty about funding. Given that councils are rate capped in New South Wales, it provides a very limited ability other than through other grant funding for them to manage their own budgets and understand the implications of what might need to go forward. It is an imposition of time and certainly recurring locked funding might provide councils with more certainty and more of an ability to allow these kinds of institutions to thrive where they run or own the buildings.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Scott, in your opening address you talked about the need for a New South Wales museums strategy. I wrote down quickly some of the suggestions you made: digitalisation and employee costs. You want to see more than simply bricks and mortar funding?

Ms SCOTT: That is correct.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: What is your rationale behind funding employee costs?

Ms SCOTT: We, for example, councils, unlike much of the rest of the economy, were not eligible for the Federal Government's JobKeeper program. So it has put councils under an enormous amount of stress financially in order to maintain the support for our employees, particularly with a range of arts and cultural institutions that, as I said, have been shut down from March this year, with many unable to reopen due to social distancing requirements.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Scott, you mentioned—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am not sure if Ms Scott had entirely finished. I think that might have been her first point.

Ms SCOTT: We would like to see a museum strategy that supports the importance of museums to communities, the importance of local governments to museums and then provides funding for a range of different mechanisms to ensure they can stay open. My final quick point is that local government funding continues to increase for these kinds of activities, as opposed to state and federal funding, which continues to decrease. The proportion of funding, even though I note others have stated local government funding in regional areas is about 46 per cent, this is creeping up higher and higher each year.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: In your answer to me you referred to employees. Have local councils during COVID been forced to shed cultural workers, arts workers, gallery workers?

Ms SCOTT: I do not have specific examples of where local governments have had to shed those kinds of jobs but we do know that in local areas they have come under enormous pressure in the absence of the provision of JobKeeper to local government. We know that these industries support a huge number of jobs. For example, in the Northern Beaches council area the closure of venues, organisations and cancellation of activities threatens up to 7,000 jobs and more than 2,500 creative businesses. So the creative ecosystems that are built around these kinds of sectors and the impact of COVID-19 are threatening jobs in a range of local government areas.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I want to follow up on a question asked by my colleague the Hon. Walt Secord. Ms Scott you mentioned a strategy for regional areas in New South Wales. I think a previous iteration of this Committee made a recommendation about an overall museum strategy for New South Wales as well. Mr Rolfe and Mr Brinkman may also want to comment but Ms Scott, why do you think that is important? What is the benefit of taking a step back and having a broader strategic approach to obviously regional galleries but also probably museums and galleries overall in New South Wales as opposed to more bitty, more project, more gallery-by-gallery, piece by piece, either funding or support, as the case may be? Why do you think that would be beneficial?

Ms SCOTT: It is beneficial is a widely held view in the local government sector. As I said, it was moved by Bathurst council, Broken Hill and a range of others and was strongly supported at our conference. We think it is important to have a museum strategy for New South Wales because it could, for example, talk to the issues that many museums are having about the pressure to continue, look at the diversity of population in an area and ensure that their cultural needs are being represented through museums and consider the funding and ongoing financial sustainability of many museums, which is currently not being considered in a strategic way. As I noted, look at collections, digitisation of those, sharing of those in a more strategic way and also to look to the importance of local government provision of these museums and the impact should there be more financial instability in local government of those kinds of things closing down without further support.

Mr BRINKMAN: I can just say that the regional gallery sector is very focused on building strong relationships with their communities. Regional galleries plan three, four or five years in advance for their exhibition programs but also for their public programs, their community programs. The existing funding situation being short-term project based means that fantastic work gets done and then it just stops. There are fantastic opportunities to build on that and to grow that so our communities can really benefit from their regional galleries. Having more surety around long-term funding rather than single-year or two-year funding would really benefit the long-term prosperity of our industry.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Do you put galleries and museums into the same bucket and say the same approach should be taken to funding for both or do you think there is a difference between the regional galleries and museums? I say that because my perception is that the regional galleries have a certain model, a consistent model—at least in the towns that I visit—whereas museums are a much more diverse entity, I suppose, than the regional galleries.

Mr ROLFE: The strategy really is about a framework that covers the museum and gallery sector that we speak of. There are some 500 entities in New South Wales, two-thirds of which are in regional New South Wales. It is about identifying and supporting the differences within those organisations. As you correctly point out, local government-aligned and professionally staffed museums and galleries are operating at a sophisticated level, and have for some time. They are resourced stretched. It is about recurrent funding. It is about people skills, knowledge, programs on the ground but then there are the volunteer and community museums that are essentially volunteer run. They are custodians, on average, of 10,000 items in collections. They are collections that are focused on local stories, local histories, local people.

They are all about community wellbeing. Their benefits are about community wellbeing, about economic benefits. They are about the story telling and capacity of those places. The framework would identify those subsets and the framework should identify the support mechanisms that are needed, that are different but are needed to support and ensure the ongoing viability and contribution of those places to what we want and know about regional New South Wales. I hasten to add there too the Aboriginal cultural centres and keeping places as part of that matrix. That is how we see the framework and the strategy being determined and described and benefiting the sector as a whole.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I was going to ask about the strategy we see from Museums Victoria. Museums Victoria is probably the largest museum organisation in the country. It has a very clear strategy. It continues to put forward clear strategy. Do you think that would be a good blueprint for New South Wales?

Mr ROLFE: It is not what we are talking about here. It is focused on museums in a cultural heritage sense. We are talking about a strategy that is more all-encompassing for New South Wales. And we are talking about a much larger sector than Victoria, so with that size there is more complexity to consider. So it is a good idea that there is a model and we can reference how government takes this on, but it is more complex both demographically and geographically in New South Wales.

Ms SCOTT: Councils would welcome a specific museum strategy that was geared towards the sector that is our museums. We think that that is necessary because whilst the sector is very diverse, it is a sector in need of support. Some of you may have, like me, visited, for example, the Brewarrina Aboriginal Museum, a tiny little museum on the banks of the river there that is right next to their world-leading Indigenous fish traps. It is quite a remarkable site, and the tiny museum there to celebrate literally tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of years of settlement on that site and explain the history of that. That is a place that is supported by the local government in the area in one of the most disadvantaged parts of our State. Without a museum strategy specifically to cover that, the Powerhouse Museum and everything in between, I fear the future of our museums in New South Wales.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is an extraordinary institution which cannot even get the funding to remove those ugly concrete barriers just outside and actually link the museum with the fish traps. It is very frustrating. If we try to pull together a collective museum and gallery strategy, it may be that you are trying to do too much, you will be pulled in different directions. Maybe we need a distinct museum strategy and a distinct gallery strategy because we are going to have different strengths and needs in those two areas. What do people think?

Mr ROLFE: It could be an argument that that is the outcome of this process. But we did talk about a framework and the framework that would take into account the needs across the sector. When you are talking about digitisation and a proposed regional program to achieve that, we are talking about taking images of collection items. So there are overlaps in the sector of that kind but there are also distinct differences. I would not paint it as black and white as that for this to be achieved.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Mr Rolfe, in your opening statement you talked about supporting the Powerhouse Parramatta development.

Mr ROLFE: Yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Is that your personal view or is that the view of your board and your membership?

Mr ROLFE: We are not a membership organisation.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Is that the view of you or your board?

Mr ROLFE: The submission was written by me and it was run past my chair, who distributed it to the board. So, yes, it is a position that everyone was very comfortable with.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Is the nature of your support specific to the proposal that is currently being put forward by the Government, or are you aware of the alternative proposal to build a Parramatta Powerhouse, for example, at the Cumberland Hospital campus?

Mr ROLFE: No. We are particularly focused on what is proposed at the moment.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Despite the concerns that have been raised, for example, around the flooding of the site, the impact on heritage properties on the site and the access to the site?

Mr ROLFE: Yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Those are things that do not concern you?

Mr ROLFE: No.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: And so, despite the fact that there is an alternative site just down the road—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Well, there is an assertion of an alternative site.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: A business case has been put together just down the road that does not have any of those concerns.

Mr ROLFE: We are focused on what is proposed.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: And that is just because that is what is proposed? That is the reason that you are focused on it? Why have you narrowed your focus to the specific proposal from the Government as opposed to alternative proposals?

Mr ROLFE: We are focused on what is proposed because it is bringing a major cultural institution to the centre of Sydney. We are focused on it because of its access and equity. We are focused on access and equity across the State and we see this as a great project—a truly significant project for Sydney—that will enable in a very real way the impact of cultural institutions in communities throughout the State. We are focused on the access, the equity and on the fact that we are delivering a reinvigorated major cultural institution to the demographic heart of this great city.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I do not think anyone is actually opposed to the idea of building a world-class facility called Parramatta Powerhouse, if that was the preferred name—or some other name—in Parramatta.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: No, I do not think that is the evidence.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I do not think anyone sitting around this table is opposed to it.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Whether we want to limit it to people around this table or in fact the evidence that we have heard, I do not actually think I have heard one witness—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You have.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —oppose the idea of building a cultural facility in Parramatta.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Oh, we are broadening it now.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The issue is the site of that facility and whether there are in fact preferable sites to the one that the Government has put forward that do not have any of the real risks attendant on the current proposal.

Mr ROLFE: I will always advocate for these places to be in the centre of town.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Rolfe, you say you are not a membership-based organisation.

Mr ROLFE: No.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Your funding comes from the New South Wales Government and the Federal Government, is that right?

Mr ROLFE: We get some funding from the Federal Government, we have some self-earned income through our touring exhibition programs, we have some philanthropic support but our key operational support does come through Create NSW.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And your organisation is designed to help small and medium museums and galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres—that is your primary mission?

Mr ROLFE: That is right. We directly work and we act as a conduit with them to connect with the cultural institutions as well.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What do you say then to all of those small and medium museums and galleries that are desperate for funding for the most basic things—sometimes fixing the toilets, stopping the roof leaking. What do you say to them about the opportunity cost of such a huge amount of public funding going into just one institution like this and just moving it? What do you say about that opportunity cost to those small and medium museums and galleries that you represent?

Mr ROLFE: We say there should be that money and more. We recognise their needs but it is not an either/or.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you identify where the additional funds will come from?

Mr ROLFE: The additional funds, from my perspective, should come from Government because of the magnitude of the benefits that these organisations provide.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So you do not recognise the complexity for you, as an advocate of small and medium sized museums and galleries, of supporting such a huge chunk of the cultural spend going to just one very large institution? You do not recognise even the complexity in that position that you have?

Mr ROLFE: I do not approach it in that way. I think that there should be more money overall for the sector.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I might ask a couple of questions, if I may, unless it was specifically on the—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If it is a follow-on from this I will go to Mr Secord and then to you, Mr Franklin.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Thank you, Mr Shoebridge. Mr Rolfe, are you familiar with the Regional Cultural Fund?

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Point of order: This is very clearly not a follow-on from the specific line of questioning that you were engaged in.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will give you a very brief opportunity to bring it back.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Walt, you're outrageous. You really are.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I actually thought that Mr Shoebridge—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Just ask the question.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I thought he was leaning towards this.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You most definitely cannot read my mind, Mr Secord. Just ask the question.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You are acting like a hostile Chair.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ask the question.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Mr Rolfe, in line with Mr Shoebridge's comment about all the expenditure going to a large, single cultural institution, are you comfortable with what you have heard and read earlier today about the Regional Cultural Fund and people submitting applications? There were 42 projects approved but four of those missed the deadline—

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Point of order—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I need to hear the end of the question and then I will deal with the point of order.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Sorry. He has been on this for a long time.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: You haven't been here.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I got a summary.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Are you comfortable with the way the Government handles and distributes funds through the Regional Cultural Fund?

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Point of order: This is clearly an entirely new line of questioning. The Government has not had any questions yet—

The Hon. WALT SECORD: It emanates from Mr Shoebridge's question, actually.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: —and I had asked first.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Franklin, I suggest that the most efficient way to deal with this is to get this answer and then straight after that answer I will go to you.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I am comfortable with that. Thank you, Mr Chair.

Mr ROLFE: Firstly, there were more than 42 organisations successful. I think it was closer to 80 or so. There was \$100 million in two tranches. I think your question refers to one.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: There were 42 museums and galleries is the evidence that we have.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: That was evidence from this morning.

Mr ROLFE: Okay. So, yes, I am comfortable.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You are comfortable with it. Thank you very much.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: You were right, Mr Chair. I take off my hat to you, sir. There are two issues I want to talk about. First is digitisation. Councillor Scott, you referred to it. Obviously this is a very important issue and I am sure all three of you have views that you would like to put on the table, particularly under the time in which we live in terms of COVID. I do not know if any of you were here when the previous witnesses from Create NSW talked about the implementation and introduction of a hub-and-spoke model for digitisation—that major facilities, regional galleries and regional museums would be charged and funded to start the digitisation process for their collections and also to work with the smaller museums and galleries around them. I wanted to ask what your views were about that and what else needs to be done in this space? Rather than more funds—this morning we had a commitment that this is being rolled out. I am interested for practical recommendations in the area of digitisation, which I think is utterly critical in terms of both equity of access and historical record preservation and cultural preservation. Perhaps we could start with you, Mr Brinkman.

Mr BRINKMAN: I certainly agree. Digitisation of collections is very, very important, despite the challenges of changing technologies always affecting that. Having the resources available to not only digitise a collection but do it in the correct software programs that will have some longevity, certainly from a regional gallery perspective—and I speak from a regional gallery sector.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: You are Blue Mountains?

Mr BRINKMAN: We are Blue Mountains, yes. Many regional galleries already have digitised their collections. I do think that maybe Mr Rolfe is better at answering that question from a museum perspective. My understanding is that many of the smaller volunteer museums do struggle with digitising their collections, whereas the gallery sector is probably better across that area.

Mr ROLFE: Yes. As Mr Brinkman correctly notes we have been working quite actively with Create NSW and with the sector on the Regional Cultural Fund application that we made for collections and stories and for regional digitisation. And the follow-on from that—that designed or delivered an idea for the hub and spoke approach to regional digitisation primarily for small museum collections. One of the reasons why we highlight the potential for this loss with COVID and bushfires—the impact that is happening there.

The disassociation between objects and stories and the volunteer drop-off—the connection that people have, the knowledge they have. We want to use this process to document, to assess the significance of those objects, and to digitise them and make them available. To give that information back to communities is a powerful tool. It has been identified that hub-and-spoke is the best way to deliver that: to have people on the ground, to have programs on the ground, to have skills and knowledge on the ground to achieve that locally.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Do you have any other specific recommendations that you would like the Committee to consider in terms of the digitisation issue that you do not think have been considered at this point by the Government?

Mr ROLFE: Working with Create NSW as we have, and there is a proposal currently in its final stages, like a lot of these things, whether or not there is going to be sufficient resources for the full allocation of documentation and digitisation to occur. As I said, on average these small organisations have 10,000 objects in collections. It takes a while to go through that work. Whether we can actually achieve that with what is available at the moment, but hopefully with the success of it I am very confident that it will lead to an ongoing program.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Councillor Scott, did you want to add anything?

Ms SCOTT: Of course we would support it if State Government moves to have a more consistent approach to digitisation. We hope that some consistent approach that would offer councils some guidance about, for example, a consistent technology solution that would enable more sharing. Councils would welcome that. As I said in my opening statement, the critical aspect here though is funding, and so, without the broadening of the base for funding, it does make it very challenging. So many council venues remain closed. It is difficult to map a path out of that closure at the moment given that we do not have certainty about the future of COVID. It is going to mean that the funding priorities for councils will largely be focused on trying to retain their staff. Without broadening of the base for funding, that makes that digitisation project, which may, for example, require the procurement of technology or a range of other costs, very challenging for local governments to undertake.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Understood. I will take that point and ask if any of the three of you would like to comment further on the impacts of COVID on your sector? I hear you in terms of what you say in terms of the staffing and the funding issues, but are there any other points that you want us to consider in our recommendations? Obviously, the landscape has now changed considerably. Mr Rolfe, I note in particular your comments about the likely and possibly permanent reduction in volunteer activity and community museums

particularly. Do any of you have any thoughts about recommendations that we should consider within this new COVID world that we find ourselves in?

Mr ROLFE: The impact is ongoing and, as I also said, it is long tailed. It is unpredicted. It has not happened and gone. Volunteering is a huge resource for staffed organisations and for community run, volunteer run and for Aboriginal participation as well. We need to keep an eye on that. There is going to be, we think, a significant loss. There may be a need for some kind of collection rescue program to be undertaken where significant objects are salvaged, secured and cared for where some of these smaller places may indeed fall over.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: So because the museums might shut, suddenly you find that these objects are not being cared for in an appropriate way?

Mr ROLFE: Yes. We have already had one instance of a small museum being broken into and objects stolen in the lockdown period. We know that there was significant dust. There was not a lot of fire destruction for collections but the dust and deterioration of that kind through that period last summer. This idea of a collection is something I think is going to become crucial to ensure these connections, objects and stories are maintained.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I want to make sure that the other two witnesses do not have anything more to add on COVID?

Mr BRINKMAN: Just to say that the challenges for the galleries sector is that the community is looking for more from their regional galleries. Communities are staying home; they are not travelling. They are looking at things to do within their local community. Empowering their communities is something that galleries do. The challenge though for local governments, as was mentioned before, is staffing. Most regional galleries have let go of their casual staff and, of course, the staffing matrix is quite casualised in the arts sector as a whole. Part-timers are really struggling for hours and many councils are taking the opportunity to reduce the opening hours of their facilities in order to try to cut or save some costs.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: When in fact we need the converse?

Mr BRINKMAN: That is it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Councillor Scott, one of the responses that local government has taken to ever-diminishing funding from the State and Federal level to museums and galleries within councils has been to consolidate the museums and the galleries as a single unit. It tends to run them with the same staff and to produce efficiencies and reduce the costs of running a museum or gallery.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Is that right?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is that the case? I can refer to a couple of reports on this, including some detailed studies in 2018 that were showing that.

Ms SCOTT: I do not pretend to have detailed knowledge in 2020 about that. Frankly, there has been a lot local governments are doing, so I do not have details about that. I can say though that we have as a policy and are advocating for a specific standalone museum strategy to ensure that they are considered in that way.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In that regard, the study I was reading yesterday by Helena Robinson is *Cultural policy, local government and museums*. It goes through the New South Wales local government sector and says that is her observation. The local government response is consolidating workforce to spread over both museums and galleries. It is perfectly reasonable in terms of the crunch on funding, but then there is the loss of individual expertise in museums and galleries. Mr Brinkman and Mr Rolfe, do either of you have any observations about that?

Mr ROLFE: Yes, I know Helena Robinson's report. From memory it was written around the time that there was what we call "convergence" being considered. It was played out in—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It was June 2018.

Mr ROLFE: Yes, it was published but it was written before that. It had an opportunity to discuss Albury, which was pursuing a converged model for its museum and gallery operations. They have since untangled. It has proved to be that they are different beasts. As I mentioned in my answer to the question earlier, there is some overlap in terms of collection care that can happen but their ways of working and their programming, the visual arts and cultural heritage, they are different beasts. The identities of these places, the personalities that they have, are different. Albury has untangled and it is going gangbusters. There are not too many others I don't think. There is a realisation of the strength. If you have a regional gallery, you want a regional gallery; if you have a regional

museum or a community museum, you want that too. It is the personality of place. The skills, the knowledge and the professionalism are different.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So we come back to that they are very distinct entities with very distinct purposes and very distinct skills and they should be treated as such.

Mr ROLFE: That is right.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Brinkman?

Mr BRINKMAN: I wholeheartedly agree. I find that you would find very few museum specialists or gallery specialists that would see very much overlap between the two professions. Yes, they are both charged with collections often but across the State, in fact across Australia, you would see a lot more convergence from a facility's point of view between libraries and galleries. There are many, many examples where local governments have constructed cultural precincts that have included a library and a gallery just as much as a museum and a gallery.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is an element in the study I was referring to. It talks about libraries, galleries and museums.

Mr BRINKMAN: But I would not say that necessarily at an operational level they are intermingled. Certainly at a facilities and a location level they may well be but their methodology is quite different.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Have you noticed that trend in local government-run facilities: not just a physical convergence but a staffing convergence as part of the response to the enormous cost pressures councils find themselves under?

Mr BRINKMAN: I would say most galleries that are constructed in recent times have been associated with another institution, like a library or a museum. But, no, I have not seen a trend of professions intermingling between museums and galleries.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have one last question. Mr Brinkman, I wanted to put to you a question similar to the one that my colleague Mr David Shoebridge asked of Mr Rolfe about the reflection of you and your members on, in some ways, the core question of this inquiry. We have this substantial amount of money—at least \$840 million in capital expenditure, let alone the recurrent costs of running, now, the two Powerhouse facilities in Sydney and Parramatta.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I thought we were all on side about the Parramatta Powerhouse. We are now not?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We are on side. I think I can fairly acknowledge that it costs money.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think we are all on side about an extraordinary, positive, world-class cultural facility in Parramatta.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: On the one hand, Mr Brinkman, we have that commitment of expenditure for those two facilities. On the other hand, we have the evidence of yourself—and Ms Scott confirmed it as well—about the much more limited funding provided on a very short-term basis to regional galleries. What is the view of you and your members on that specific inequity, in a way?

Mr BRINKMAN: Most of our members are extremely enthusiastic about an additional site in Parramatta servicing western Sydney. I agree with Mr Rolfe that, ideally, we would like to see that plus additional regional funding. I think it is a very emotive issue at the moment because so many of our members are really struggling. To be honest, within the sector most of our members really are not thinking very hard about the Powerhouse at the moment; they are thinking very hard about how they can open their doors next week and how they can get through this current crisis. So, yes, it is obvious that a lot of money is being spent on this institution. I support, and our members support, the existence of any additional cultural institutions that are able to tell the stories of our State. At the same time, we really do need more regional support; not only more regional support but, probably more importantly, some surety rather than short-term project-based grant money—something that we can look at two, three, four, five years down the track and be able to tell our councils that support exists, so it is worthwhile continuing to support because we also have the support of the State Government.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: There are a number of multi-year funding streams, as well.

Mr BRINKMAN: To a maximum of about three years.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Ms Scott, I want to ask you—with your City of Sydney councillor hat on—about the future of the Ultimo site. Obviously, it is very pleasing—we had evidence from the Lord Mayor supporting the Government's announcement to maintain Powerhouse Ultimo, as it were.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: And enthusiastic evidence from the general manager.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Enthusiastic evidence from everyone supporting the Powerhouse Ultimo. But there has been some confusion, perhaps, about what that actually looks like. The final business case is yet to be released, as I am sure you know. What are your views about the future of that site? In particular, I might ask about propositions to, say, transition it into some kind of lyric theatre or some kind of quite alternative vision to the current Powerhouse Museum that is operating there.

Ms SCOTT: As a City of Sydney councillor, I obviously support strongly the retention of a Powerhouse cultural institution in Ultimo. It was very disappointing under a previous Government policy where there was pitting of, really, places like Ultimo in the City of Sydney against Parramatta. So it is welcome that there is a standalone government commitment, as I understand it, to fund and operate a cultural institution of their own in Parramatta. I understand that is something that the Parramatta lord mayor and council strongly support. I do think there is a continued need for a very strong, thriving cultural institution such as the current Powerhouse Museum existing in Ultimo. I have certainly gone there with my children. We know thousands and thousands of other resident families in the City of Sydney visit there and, of course, so many global visitors who come to Sydney from around the world or even, in COVID times, from around the State continue to want to visit the Powerhouse in Ultimo. I would not want to see it converted into a site that was not a very similar business model to the one that it currently has.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Councillor Scott, you indicated that a number of regional councils are very much under pressure. Have any councils told you that they are at the brink of potentially mothballing or shutting some of their regional museums? Are there some that should be front of mind?

Ms SCOTT: I do not have permission to name them, but yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Would you mind taking that on notice? Then you can consult.

Ms SCOTT: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. We will take a short break.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

SARAH RUBERTO, Business Manager, Marketing, Events & Culture, Goulburn Mulwaree Council, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

JACQUI HEMSLEY, Manager, Arts, Culture and Tourism, Lake Macquarie City Council, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

JESSICA DOWDELL, Lifelong Learning and Engage Coordinator, Lake Macquarie City Council, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

NIOMI SANDS, Regional Gallery Director, Clarence Valley Council, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our next witnesses. Starting with Ms Ruberto, would you like to make a short opening address? Maybe limit it to no more than two minutes.

Ms RUBERTO: Sure. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. Goulburn Mulwaree Council has seen great support from the New South Wales Government in recent years towards arts infrastructure development, having received \$4.9 million in State Government funding for the development of our performing arts centre and \$297,000 for the conservation of St Clair heritage museum. Whilst grant programs focused on the development of arts infrastructure are important, there is little to no funding available to support increasing operational requirements and risks associated with museums and galleries and their significant and unique collections. Fires and floods have highlighted the risks in the lack of disaster preparedness across the State for the arts, which lack funding to address this need. COVID has taught the sector the importance of embracing technology to remain relevant and present. For many in the sector, this is not an option unless opportunities for education and access to funding become available.

There are increasing funding pressures on local government, particularly with cost-shifting from the State Government and the rate cap. Museums, galleries and libraries are often the services that suffer because of this, with funding reallocated to what the community demand and consider more essential services. The importance of the sector for the visitor economy, community wellbeing and liveability of destinations cannot be underestimated. Results from the National Arts Participation Survey highlight the importance of arts and creativity to child development, education, local business and skills for the future. We welcome and encourage a museum strategy for the State—a strategy focused on the role of the State institutions and their relationship with regional museums, with appropriate consultation from the outset. Likewise, we welcome an up-to-date arts policy that draws on the role of the regions in the development and delivery of sector growth opportunities, including infrastructure, digitisation, education and conservation. We strive to deliver museum-quality exhibitions, and storage and display requirements with limited funding.

Currently, there is no available funding to museums to assist with operations. Access to additional program funding is required for both museums and galleries. Capital and grant funding should be increased and consideration given to an annual cultural subsidy. The current model of funding from the State Library to regional public libraries is efficient and effective, enabling regional public libraries to use the subsidy to cater for individual needs whilst taking a strategic approach. The regional arts communities are full of passionate, dedicated and innovative staff and volunteers, who work tirelessly on exhibitions, public programs, collections, interpretation, digitisation and much more. They do this with varying levels of financial support and investment and welcome the opportunity to be actively consulted, engaged and part of the decision-making process for the future of the arts sector and the development of an equitable funding model to ensure this important sector is funded appropriately.

The CHAIR: Would either Ms Hemsley or Ms Dowdell like to make a short opening statement?

Ms HEMSLEY: Yes. We will be sharing our statements. I will go first and we will then have Ms Dowdell, if that is all right. In 2018 the council supported an internal restructure and created the Arts, Culture and Tourism [ACT] team. This new converged team was created to improve the value and provision of contemporary visual arts and performing arts, music and dance, urban and public art, park activation, literacy and social history, heritage and cultural collections for our community. Since that time ACT has recruited 22 new creative professionals with another four in the coming 12 months. With an operating budget of \$14.3 million and a cultural infrastructure works program that is self-funded to the value of nearly \$20 million, the team is in growth and is reflective of the council and community's increased value and commitment to growing culture and creative capital. These upcoming major projects have been fully funded through Lake Macquarie City Council, outside generous contribution from the creative fund through Create NSW of \$2.1 million towards the multi-art pavilion. This space will be opening in July 2021.

In addition, there are three co-located spaces for collection, exhibition and community at Windale with a digital and community exhibition space and library worth \$9 million, the Sugarloaf Library Museum—a converged library-museum space valued at \$7 million—and the Rathmines Theatre and Heritage Centre. ACT is a converged team of programs that are collaboratively curated and resourced based on customer focus and deliverables rather than facilities. For ACT to meet its future ambitions in developing cultural collections and quality cultural spaces and to continuously engage with our community, we would like the Government to review and develop strong, collaborative and innovative statewide policy to enable the sector to thrive and become more resilient.

Ms DOWDELL: Our submission supports a statewide museums and galleries strategy to guide a coordinated and collaborative approach to the sector's recent COVID recovery and, as a minimum, address key areas for growth in the sector such as infrastructure, digitisation, education, preservation and improving professional development opportunities for cultural professionals within the State. In the case of Lake Macquarie, we have gone from one facility that meets collection exhibition guidelines and climate-control standards to, in the next two years, five facilities with a proactive approach to growing the city's heritage, visual arts and multi-arts collections. These facilities and their success would be greatly improved if there was increased access to State collections through object loans or touring. These costs are currently inhibitive or we are unable to access due to regional facility collection management limitations.

It is the experience of Lake Macquarie City Council that we have both been able to access and unable to access collections in line with larger institutions' policies. The need for considerable infrastructure has inhibited our ability to access collections. While we are self-funding to improve these collections, the restrictions still remain. We are asking the Government to improve the ability of lending and borrowing institutions, revise the collection climate-control conditions in line with international standards, list the overall capabilities of the sector for investment in cultural facilities and professional development opportunities, and incentivise innovation in the sector through the display of significant collections in regional locations. We are very proud of our council and our community's commitment towards the programs and projects that ACT and Lake Macquarie is developing and consider that the future for the sector is very positive.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Lastly, Ms Sands?

Ms SANDS: Thank you so much. Firstly I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and acknowledge the Bundjalung peoples, the traditional custodians of the land on which I am situated. I pay tribute and respect to Elders both past and present of the Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl nations, in which our council boundaries lie. I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to speak at the Government's inquiry into the management of the Powerhouse and other museums and cultural projects within New South Wales. The Clarence Valley has a vibrant cultural and heritage sector that comprises local and regional library services, an active Aboriginal community including the visual arts, storytellers, language and dance groups, community theatre groups, several dance groups, a conservatorium of music, a regional gallery, private galleries, the plunge Arts & Cultural Festival, and a number of volunteer community museums that are importantly supported by the museum advisory program co-funded by Museums & Galleries of NSW in the Clarence Valley.

I also note the gallery which I oversee provides professional development for our local museum sector through our Museums Unpacked program and we also provide professional development for our local creators through our Artists Unpacked program. The valley has an active, creative community and an emerging cultural economy turning practice into business, which we are very proud of. Through Create NSW's Regional Cultural Fund, the Government has funded an exciting \$7.6 million expansion of the Grafton Regional Gallery, which I am happy to report is tracking on time and on budget. This grant also funded the Lawrence Museum. They have received \$186,000 for renovations through this fund and, in addition, the Yamba Museum has received grant funding of \$250,000 through the regional communities program. It is important, given the Government's investment in new infrastructure, that it is backed by ongoing program funding. At present Grafton Regional Gallery receives through Create NSW a \$70,000 contribution to our annual program, which is less than 10 per cent of our programming cost for the gallery. Four of our seven museums within the Clarence Valley are actively seeking grant funds for their ongoing projects.

But mainly this sector is run entirely through the goodwill of our volunteers. To effectively support regional communities and to provide access to outstanding arts, cultural and heritage experience, grant-funded museums and galleries require additional resourcing to that which is provided to assist our regional organisations through—we would like to see access to professional services for the sector and access to State collections through touring exhibitions and collection loans. This allows regional galleries and museums to present outstanding cultural experiences to regional communities that are otherwise not available within regional New South Wales.

Additional support and funding is required for the volunteer museum sector to ensure the longevity and sustainability of these organisations that are the keepers of our local histories and stories. Increased support in the form of partnerships between regional organisations and significant State and national arts organisations would foster the cultural economy. It would support our creative industries and make regional New South Wales a more livable region for our communities.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I direct my first question to the two representatives from Lake Macquarie City Council. You have asked for a statewide museums and galleries strategy. How would you feel about a funding structure similar to what exists for libraries in New South Wales?

Ms HEMSLEY: My understanding of the libraries funding structure is that it is done using a quota by population. It also includes a subsidy that is revised with regard to capital infrastructure contribution. The question with library services is that there is some legislation and there is a stronger State Library presence in that sector. My experience is we have not had that strong sector support through the Art Gallery of New South Wales, or the State institution. If we were able to get that support then it might be an interesting model to work through with regard to feasibility.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I remind the other participants that at the end of the process we make recommendations to the Government. I would like to ask the representative of Clarence Valley Council how she would feel about a structure for museums and galleries similar to what exists for libraries.

Ms SANDS: It would be something that we would be really interested in, as Ms Hemsley said, as part of a feasibility study. Within our council we do regional as well as Clarence Valley library services. We are split between both because we have a partnership with a number of other regions within the mid North Coast and the Northern Rivers area. I definitely think that it would be nice to have a bit more structure and a bit more support from the State level. I know that the art gallery and all of the other institutions are very keen to support us but they are restrained by their own resources. They would love to do more regional work but they are facing budget issues, along with everyone else.

Ms RUBERTO: It would certainly be something that we would support a thorough investigation into. We find that with our Goulburn Mulwaree Library, the funding model works really well. It is not only the funding component, it is the support that is available through the State Library. From our perspective, funding is not the only answer to the problems at hand here. Ensuring that there are appropriate levels of support through State organisations, similar to the State Library, for galleries and museums would, as well as a fixed funding model, be a really great outcome for the regions.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Are you familiar with the issue of the Maudslay steam engine? What is Goulburn Mulwaree Council's approach at the moment? Are you optimistic or frustrated?

Ms RUBERTO: We are always optimistic. We are in a little bit of a holding pattern at the moment. We were in the very early stages of negotiations with the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences to return the Maudslay back to Goulburn, which would essentially be bringing it home. That engine started its life in Goulburn, at the Goulburn Brewery. As far as we have been informed, and we have not spoken to anyone from the Powerhouse for a little while now, it is still on the table, subject to negotiations. They are looking at things in relation to environmental factors—where it would be housed, how it would be conserved and council's experience in relation to dealing with objects of that size.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Does Goulburn Mulwaree Council have a proposed site or a facility where the steam engine, if they were successful in returning it, would be located?

Ms RUBERTO: Yes, absolutely. We have the Goulburn Historic Waterworks, which was built in Goulburn between 1883 and 1885. It operated a pumping facility that addressed Goulburn's first reticulated water supply. The waterworks houses two historic engines from the—I am just going to check the dates before I tell you the wrong date—1800s. We also have the Hick Hargreaves engine, which is the eldest of three left in the world. We are in a unique position at the waterworks. It is a rare facility. It is the only complete steam powered municipal water supply left in its original location in the Southern Hemisphere. It has been in council's hands since the 1800s. We have staff, volunteers and experts who manage that site and run the engines. We do regular steaming there. From our perspective, returning the Maudslay to the Goulburn Historic Waterworks would mean it is in very safe hands.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think that all of us acknowledge the extraordinary work that each of your councils does on such a limited budget with such crucial cultural institutions. One of the concerns that is reflected through all of the submissions is the lack of ongoing funding. You celebrate the individual grants but

then you are sometimes left with a big institution, which then just requires more recurrent funding, and all of that ends up being caught by local ratepayers. Have you got a solution to this problem with recurrent funding?

Ms RUBERTO: Certainly from Goulburn Mulwaree's perspective, we are always thrilled to receive grant funding. While it is a wonderful thing, and it allows us to develop, enhance and create new products and experiences for our communities and visitors, it does leave us with something that we need to maintain. It adds additional operational, staffing and maintenance costs. The only solution, from our perspective, would be some kind of permanent funding solution. Grants are great but they never really deal with operational requirements. They tend to mostly deal with feasibility studies, looking at different aspects of things or building something new. Something that could give us the ability to maintain and grow what we have got—grow our staff, try new things and be innovative—would be a real game changer for the sector.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: To the Clarence Valley Council, you have mentioned that only 10 per cent of your recurrent funding comes from the State Government. You are about to open a \$7.6 million expansion of your regional gallery. Who is going to pay for the operational costs of that?

Ms SANDS: We do not have any additional operational costs as part of our council allocation. Some of the work that is being done on the planning for the expansion—we have a number of spaces that we can use for commercial activity. We have got some media room spaces, which we did not previously have in the gallery. We have expanded our focus. For instance, we are looking further into expanding our philanthropy programs. The shop will be looked at as well. In a nutshell, we are diversifying our income streams to ensure that we remain sustainable. In the current space, we did not quite have anything that could allow us to get those sustainable income streams. But with the new space, we will have those abilities. We are feeling the need within our region for some of those spaces which we do not currently have.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I do not know how long you have each been in the sector but Clarence gets about 10 per cent of its programming costs from the State Government and 90 per cent coming from local or other sources. How is that reflected historically? Has that proportion of State funding been consistent for the last few years or has it shrunk over time?

Ms SANDS: I have been at Clarence Valley Council for two years. Previously I was in Port Macquarie and the funding level that we get is exactly the same as what I was getting in Port Macquarie. In the 10 years that I was in Port Macquarie I did see an increase as we increased our programs but I think it has stayed stable for probably the last four years or so.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What about the other councils? What about your proportion of State funding, the total funding you have for your museums and galleries? Lake Macquarie?

Ms HEMSLEY: Our operational budget at \$14.3 million, we receive through Create NSW just for our art gallery, Museum of Art and Culture, \$100,000 a year. That has been stable for the last five or six years. That is not a large amount of programming funding for our culture budget, but we are a converged team. For us to operate the budgets for our future capital cultural works we created a post-construction operational plan for each of those facilities. For council to support ongoing infrastructure in cultural facilities we needed to incorporate sound operational business plans and that included a business case mix of commercial, multi-use, community use, cultural activity, education and philanthropy revenue streams as well. We budgeted that there would not be additional funding costs because of the fact that that was such a variable.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You get less than a fraction of 1 per cent of your funding from the State Government in Lake Macquarie?

Ms HEMSLEY: Yes. Our programming for programs and directly cultural programs is about \$4 million a year, and that is across events and festivals all the way through our cultural spaces, and it is \$100,000 a year.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What about Goulburn?

Ms RUBERTO: The funding our art gallery receives from Create is also less than 10 per cent. While we are talking about it, we are in a bit of a holding pattern with Create at the moment. We, like most regional galleries, put in our submission for the multi-year funding and we are still waiting. The last that we heard was that an announcement would be made in June. It is now September. We have not heard a thing. Most galleries are in the same position as us. Some will be—their current funding will finish in December and there is no indication of any funding from Create beyond that. We are in a difficult position. It is hard to forward plan when we are being strung out with funding decisions.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You mention in your submission that the last time you had a funding decision the funding agreement went from three to five years and there was no opportunity to even review that. Can you talk us through that?

Ms RUBERTO: Correct, yes. We had a three-year funding agreement from 2016 to 2018. There were some changes going on at Create at the time and that funding agreement was extended for one year, then it was extended for a further year. It went from three to five years. We were stuck with the money that we had, which we certainly would not say no to that, but there was no opportunity for—despite attempts from our gallery director to have discussions with Create staff about the opportunity to bid for more funding over that two-year extension, those conversations did not go anywhere. We have been stuck with \$80,000, which certainly has been wonderful to have, but as the gallery grows and our reputation grows and our programming grows we need more money to back that up.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is not just from June to September that you have been stuck, you have really been stuck since 2018 in a holding pattern.

Ms RUBERTO: Yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Ms Ruberto, I want to ask about your reflections, but if the other councils are in the same situation they can chime in too. What are the consequences of those kinds of delays? You mentioned the obvious one, it is difficult to forward plan. How does that play out in terms of the consequences for the galleries, for your cultural institutions when you do not have that certainty?

Ms RUBERTO: It makes it very difficult to forward plan. Galleries are renowned for programming sometimes two to three years in advance because we are engaging artists to create new works for the exhibitions that we are programming. It puts a lot of people in limbo and it also can at times make councillors and senior management in local government question the viability of the sector and of libraries, galleries and museums when we are in this position that there is no guarantee of funding. It makes them question why councils should invest so much money in local government if it appears that the State is not interested in coming to the party.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely. Are the representatives from Clarence and Lake Macquarie in a similar position? Are you also waiting for feedback from Create NSW on multi-year funding agreements? I see some nodding. Yes, Ms Sands, did you want to chip in first about your experiences in Clarence?

Ms SANDS: We were on an annual funding agreement. Our funding finished in December and we applied for multi-year funding as well this round. At the moment in the next couple of weeks I need to do the programming, the actual production of our publication for January to July. We are hoping we get funding, but because we need to meet print deadlines, there is a whole number of deadlines that we just have to hope that we are going to get through and make sure that we have got other funding to cover that so that we can actually continue our standard operation. That puts us in a very tricky position because you never are 100 per cent sure and you do need those long lead times.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Ms Hemsley or Ms Dowdell from Lake Macquarie, are you also in a similar situation? What are your experiences?

Ms DOWDELL: Yes, we are in exactly the same situation. We put in funding to commence in June this year as a multi-year program for all of our facilities, not a single facility, across all of our arts, cultural and heritage programs across the city. And yes, we are in the same position, we have not heard. The real effect is to our community in that we are not able to confirm what we can offer for them. Thinking about school programming, that has a really long lead time to ensure that schools and teachers are able to access our arts and cultural facilities. At the moment we should be developing and offering what we will have for 2021 for all of those school students throughout Lake Macquarie. Without certainty around funding that is an area that we cannot confirm that offering. That is just one example across exhibition programs and other facilities. It is really about the security and timeliness of finding out that information.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: When did you put the bid in? You were waiting for a decision at the end of the last financial year, when did you meet the deadline to put it in by?

Ms HEMSLEY: March.

Ms DOWDELL: End of March, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Everybody is saying March, is that right?

Ms RUBERTO: Yes.

Ms HEMSLEY: Yes.

Ms DOWDELL: Yes.

Ms SANDS: Yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I ask a question for context, and each of the councils can respond. Is this something that is common or is this COVID-related, or is this what happens with funding applications to Create NSW and the State Government? Ms Sands?

Ms SANDS: Create had taken a lot of feedback on board about the deadlines and when they released the requirements for this year's funding rounds they actually had nominated when we would hear, which was the first time we had ever seen that opportunity to find out when you might be successful. In the past sometimes I believe we have not found out until near December for funding in January, which again has put us in a position that we are going: Oh my gosh, what are we doing? But we had seen some real change and that gave us confidence and a bit of surety that they have been listening. I understand COVID has been a problem everywhere, but we have not been given a "You were meant to find out in June, but you can now find out in July". There has not really been a timetable.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Ruberto?

Ms RUBERTO: My comments are very similar to Ms Sands' in that we have also had that same experience where we have been waiting. That is often the case with grant funding, but the communication has probably been the major aspect that has not been handled particularly well. If there was regular communication to say, "There has been a hold-up. Announcements will now be made in such and such time", at least then we can report that up the line to our senior staff to say, "We have not heard, but we understand that this announcement is forthcoming on this particular date." Communication is critical to make sure that everyone is informed, and in the absence of that we are all just making assumptions about what is happening with this funding. That is not really helping anybody.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Lake Macquarie, would you like to add?

Ms HEMSLEY: Yes. I am a bit old school. I have been around since it used to be the Ministry for the Arts, which is going back a few years, and it does ebb and flow as time goes on with regard to liaison relationship with Create NSW. However, over the decade or so it does seem to be a little bit more unsure now, rather than say five or so years ago when there would be that one-on-one liaison contact. That seems to have stopped and I think some of that communication has missed the mark a little bit. I would agree with my colleagues.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: As I said earlier today, we make recommendations in the final report. How would you feel about a recommendation requiring the Government to spell out guidelines for the application process and when decisions are made?

Ms RUBERTO: I would support that.

Ms SANDS: Likewise.

Ms DOWDELL: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How about we make a recommendation now that they make a decision? You kind of need it now, don't you?

Ms HEMSLEY: Yes, we do.

Ms SANDS: Yes, please.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: For the benefit of the witnesses, I am Parliamentary Secretary for the Arts.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Make a decision.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You can do it today.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I agree with you. The communication sounds appalling and you are absolutely right, it should be fixed. I have already texted a number of senior people to that end. That is exactly what these things should be doing. It should be identifying problems and getting the message through. You have succeeded in that today. We have got the \$50 million COVID fund, that I am sure you are all aware of, and I suspect that what is happening is they are trying to pool that with the funding that councils are getting. Having

said that, the communication is still not good enough and you need that certainty. I strongly support there being more certainty for local councils so that you can do the programming and so on that you need.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We will issue an interim report this afternoon.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: We should write a letter, I think.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think we should. Absolutely. Ms Ruberto, one of the concerns you have is transparency around funding decisions made by Create NSW. Obviously part of the backdrop of this inquiry is that a very large amount of money in the sector has only gone to the Powerhouse Museum, and the opportunity costs that some of us have views about. You also point to some other cases where substantial funding went to one organisation when there was an opportunity cost for a bunch of smaller institutions, particularly regional ones, and they lost out, and you talk about the funding in 2018 to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Could you expand on that?

Ms RUBERTO: Sure. The example of the funding that went to Sydney Symphony Orchestra, from our perspective, is the only major issue highlighted to us that we have had concern with. What it does show, though, is the disparity with funding decisions that are made, and the fact that when someone is getting a big bucket of money there are a whole heap of other people that miss out. The current model is not as effective as it could be. I go back to the conversation we had earlier where we were looking at a model, whether that is along the lines of how the regional libraries are funded or whatever that looks like, that is proportionate to each gallery and museum. That would have a much longer lasting effect across the State rather than focusing on major organisations that take a big chunk of the pie each time and everybody else is left in the wings with very little money to do anything with, if any money at all.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ms Sands, I see you nodding. I am not going to put words in your mouth, but do you think part of the problem is that grant-based funding is about announceables and ribbon cutting? So that is a good announceable for the State Government, but what is desperately needed is the less sexy funding, which are ongoing contributions. Is there too much focus on that ribbon-cutting, grant-based funding?

Ms SANDS: I definitely think there is. We do need support that is not really in the big, beautiful infrastructure. Having said that, we are doing some big, beautiful infrastructure here. We have co-funded the museum adviser program for seven local museums. Some of them are able to pull together funding applications and some of them do not have the expertise. We assist where we can but we do not run those organisations. Sometimes they need help mowing their lawns. It is down to those base-level requirements. Lawn mowing isn't really sexy. There is a need for more support across a variety of things. It is also understanding that there is not that expertise to write those grant applications. They are not easy. I find that I have to put at least two months of my schedule aside just so that we can do good-quality grant applications. Volunteer museums do not have that expertise or even that time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Surely your time would be better spent running museums and galleries than filling in grant applications. The more we can move towards recurrent funding, the more of your time can be spent doing your job. Would that be a fair observation? Everyone is laughing. Is there a general sense of exhaustion and agreement on that? For the transcript, everyone is nodding.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: There has been a significant focus on the amount of money that is being spent on some Sydney cultural institutions, and I take your point about ongoing operational funding—I get that—but we have also heard in evidence from both Clarence and Goulburn councils that you are getting significant investment in cultural infrastructure. That is a good thing, right?

Ms RUBERTO: Definitely.

Ms SANDS: Absolutely.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They all acknowledge that in their submissions. They say it in their submissions.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: How about you let them talk for a change? Sorry.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Settle down.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Do not tell me to settle down.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You should settle down.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Point of order: That is offensive for that member to say that.

The CHAIR: Address your comments through the Chair, please.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I am doing so, sir.

The CHAIR: I would like you to withdraw that comment, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sure. My only observation is that if you want to take a point of order do it through the Chair, rather than as you did earlier when you did it across the floor. Sure, you do not need to settle down. I withdraw it.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Your supercilious attitude does not befit you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Again, there you go.

The CHAIR: Order! We have just settled that.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Sorry about that, witnesses. Ms Sands, did you want to comment on that?

Ms SANDS: We were really fortunate in being successful with our regional cultural fund grant, but our council had that project as part of a long-term plan. It was not necessarily on the shelf, but we had it there as something that we would take up, if we had the opportunity. They had already bought the property behind the gallery, so it was something that was always long term. It was an aspiration for council to expand the gallery site. It is taking those opportunities when they present themselves. Local government spends so much time, and rightly so, doing long-term master plans to make sure our communities are livable for the foreseeable future.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Your comments about the need for certain inoperational funding have been taken on board.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Could I ask a question of each of you and I suppose I come at this from two perspectives. One involves, in a sense, a cultural institution and that is in terms of the regional conservatoriums of music which face parallel issues to that which you talk about. They would make similar observations about the amount of money poured into the conservatorium of music as opposed to the various regional conservatoria. I also come at it from the point of view of having been involved in a fairly successful sporting organisation in Tamworth, which was hockey. It was very good at filling in grant funding applications and did a lot better than other sports in the town. One of the things that grant funding seems to work with, from my perspective, is organisations that are essentially autonomous from government, such as sporting organisations and to an extent the conservatorium of music. If you make it recurrent funding, whether it be for a shooting club or for a conservatorium of music or for a hockey club or, indeed, for a library what is then the relationship between the funding body and the body that is receiving the recurrent funding? Is ownership then being taken by the funder of that organisation and withdrawing its autonomy?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is a good question. You see it in a lot of non-government sectors. Once you become dependent on government funding you lose your autonomy, that is the question.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: The funding is conditional upon meeting various criteria. I am just trying to work out how the model would work.

Ms DOWDELL: I guess, looking at the library funding model, it allows autonomy, it allows creativity through the support of a State organisation. Looking at the delivery of arts and cultural services across the State in the same way that library services are delivered across the State, where it is not regional and metropolitan, there is not a division. It is looking at how all those different parts function as a whole in the delivery. In the same way that sporting organisations within the State function. Your State sporting organisation is directly supported by your regional organisations that act as feeders to those State organisations and the same way back again. Looking at the arts and cultural industry and separating it between regional and metropolitan does not really make sense when they actually need to be closer. We need to be working together in a more integrated approach where State organisations offer that support to regions and regions are then feeding back through to the State organisations. The library model certainly does that. It allows for consistent funding, it allows for strategic planning for organisations, it allows that State level support and then for that back and forth between the regional and the metropolitan organisations. You have both collaborative work and individual creativity happening.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I know others may wish to comment. The questions I asked of the previous witnesses related to what I see as, in a sense, a different model that applies to, for instance, regional galleries where rather like libraries there seems to be a fairly consistent model to museums, particularly in regional and

country areas, which is far more diverse. Would you comment? I can see how you would provide recurrent funding based on a per capita basis for galleries, but I am wondering how you would do that for the museum sector?

Ms RUBERTO: I think by having a very clear State policy for the museum sector would be the starting point for that.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I can understand that. That is well made.

Ms RUBERTO: And then from within that policy, in my mind, there would be certain criteria and sub criteria depending on the level of the museum. That could be a local government-run museum that is fully staffed by paid staff versus a community museum that it is entirely voluntary run by an incorporated association, or something of that ilk. There would need to be a range of criteria depending on the museum. There is incredible diversity even within our museums here in Goulburn, the council-run museums and the community-run museums. It would not be a simple fix and it would not be something that could necessarily happen quickly, but with appropriate consultation and getting the right people in the room to represent the sector I am sure we could come up with something.

Ms SANDS: Definitely. I would say that by taking that more tailored approach you could cater to the fields of development needed from the sector. You will not have the same expectations across the different areas but you could then provide the support that they really need by using that tailored approach.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have two more questions. We heard from Ms Sands at Clarence and that she might spend up to two months preparing grant applications to be at the standard that they need to be in order to secure funding. I wanted feedback from Ms Ruberto, Ms Hemsley and Ms Dowdell about how much time they spend or their council spends on the grant application process, how much of their time is being consumed by that?

Ms RUBERTO: From Goulburn's perspective, we have two dedicated grants staff, they are full-time staff and their entire job is to look for grant opportunities and to relate them to relevant council projects that we have in the pipeline. We obviously have a bit of a wish list that we are looking for funding for. As well as those two dedicated full-time staff, depending on the nature of the grant, it could involve up to three or four other staff to provide specialist input into that particular grant. I know from our perspective with our grant applications for Create one of our grants officers leads that application in consultation with our gallery director and our gallery officer. There are three staff that pretty well—I would say the grants officer, it would be a fair chunk of their work, and as Ms Hemsley said it would probably take a couple of months to bring it all together. It would take probably 30 to 40 per cent of their time over that two months to bring all that together.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: And Lake Macquarie?

Ms HEMSLEY: The council does not have a dedicated grants officer. We have an internal project working group and we work through it collaboratively with different grants. With regards to arts, culture and tourism and then some festivals funding it is within our team. Because we are a converged team we have a leadership group. We have five key divisions within the arts, culture and tourism team of which Ms Dowdell is one of those leaders and we meet and do those grants collaboratively. We are very aggressive and proactive about aiming at putting in time and effort with grants, in particular the attachments and submissions. We spend a lot of time getting together feasibility reports, research projects, business cases, concept designs to try and put forward the best application we possibly can. It would take a big chunk of about seven peoples FTE every year.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: My last question, and anyone can comment on it as it is a fairly broad question. I want a quick reflection as we only have five minutes left. How important are the facilities that we are talking about, these regional museums and galleries and cultural facilities, to your regional tourism offering? How significant is securing the funding to get these facilities up to scratch and presenting the best possible face for your local communities in terms of attracting regional tourism?

Ms DOWDELL: Extremely, is the short answer. While Lake Macquarie has beaches and the lake, its arts and cultural facilities are second on that list to the environmental aspects of the reasons for people to visit. It is essential, especially when we are moving from an industrial city into a city that relies heavily on tourism. We are moving away from mining, so tourism is our next best economic move and we need this facility.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Any additional comments from Goulburn or Clarence?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You can take it as read.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I do not know why I bother asking questions.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You are going to get everyone to agree with you that they are essential.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: There is a difference between you putting that on the record and their words. Their words can go into the report.

The CHAIR: Order! Address your remarks through the Chair at all times.

Ms RUBERTO: For Goulburn, heritage and cultural tourism is the main attractor of people to our destination here. I might stress that in 2018 heritage and cultural tourism was worth \$14 billion to the New South Wales economy, so I think that says it all.

Ms SANDS: In the Clarence Valley it is really important, especially within Grafton itself because that has been bypassed by the Pacific Highway. We see the development of the regional gallery as a real boost to the economy within the region. Our museums across the whole area of the Clarence Valley, because we are quite a large council area, each of those organisations provide an economic benefit for tourism within the villages across the Clarence. So it is really essential.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Ruberto from Goulburn Mulwaree, I have one final question. This morning in evidence from Michael Rolfe, the chief executive officer of Museums and Galleries NSW made reference to a theft that occurred at the Goulburn Historic Waterworks Museum. Is that where you indicated that if the steam engine were returned to Goulburn it would be placed? The theft took place on 16 February. Have steps been taken to improve security there? I understand it was described as a one-of-a-kind solid brass oilwell cover? What is the status of that? Has security been stepped up and improved?

Ms RUBERTO: Yes, there were three brass oilwell covers on one of the engines there and one of those was stolen. It is about so big, not a big piece at all, but, yes, we have increased monitoring with our staff and volunteers who are in the pump house whenever we have people through. We are also very fortunate that through the skills set of one of our volunteers, he was able to produce a replica piece to replace the stolen piece and to look at it you would not even know it was any different.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Can you guarantee that if the steam engine were returned to Goulburn that there would be the appropriate security measures in place?

Ms RUBERTO: Sure, yes there would be. The reality is that is the first incident of vandalism to anything within the pump house that I am aware of. Council takes matters like that very seriously and would ensure that if we wanted to get the Maudslay engine with the other engines that we would make sure that security of those was appropriate.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: At the moment the reports that I am getting back when I talk to people in the regions is that there are many people who want to visit regional New South Wales and they can hardly find a room or a booking, particularly over holiday periods. Is that reflected in interest in museums and galleries at the moment? Is that huge interest—because people cannot travel overseas or interstate and there is a specific interest in regional tourism—the type of feedback you are getting on the ground?

Ms RUBERTO: From our perspective, there is an interest. Interestingly though, we are not back to our normal visitation numbers. The only exception to that would be the Rocky Hill War Memorial and Museum but it opened as a brand new museum on 1 June. The numbers to that site are through the roof but certainly our gallery and some of our other sites are not, including our Visitor Information Centre, as high as they would normally be pre-COVID-19.

Ms HEMSLEY: With Lake Macquarie we are not as high as we were pre-COVID-19. This time last year we were trending at about 40 per cent visitation to our regional galleries. However, we have just opened a new heritage centre space at Rathmines Theatre so there has been a lot of strong interest, growing interest in that area.

Ms DOWDELL: It is a little bit of a change in demographics. Certainly over the school holiday period, our venues that were targeted at children and family holiday visitors and had COVID-19 safe precautions in place, the numbers were extremely high at those venues, higher than they had been the previous year over the holiday period. However, overall there is a decline in numbers because people are thinking outdoor, heritage trails, driving trails, opportunities that do not require them to be confined in spaces with other with other individuals. So there is an increase in interest but it is a different type of interest than we have seen in the past.

Ms SANDS: At the gallery we always expected to have a very low visitation because we have construction surrounding Prentice House so we always expected that to be at the low visitation rate. We did see one opening to limited hours. We did see that there are a lot more tourism visitors because we have a tourism portal on site. We get a bit of a gauge with what is happening tourism-wise. But anecdotal evidence from our

caravan parks, once they could re-book, they were fully booked out at Yamba and in other areas. So we are seeing a lot of road trip visitors to the region.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

RENZO BENEDET, President and Secretary, Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum, affirmed and examined
DONNA WHITE, Vice President and Custodian, Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum, affirmed and examined
DEBBIE SOMMERS, Volunteer Curator, Port Macquarie Museum, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome you all. Mr Benedet, would you like to start by making a short opening statement?

Mr BENEDET: Thanks, Mr Chair. Good afternoon, all. Thanks for the opportunity to submit our views in writing and also here in person. We are a community-based regional museum run by volunteers. We are unique in the sense that we have the memory and the history of the industrial heritage of the Lithgow Small Arms Factory. We started a museum in 1996. We are renowned nationally and internationally for our collection and also our knowledge. We are also recognised by UNESCO for our archives collection and we are a leading tourism venue for the city of Lithgow. I just want to make a few points. This is addressing the context of community-based, volunteer-run museums. The Government needs to be very clear and very proactive in the way it supports those museums. Those museums hold intrinsic significance. In our case that significance is either not understood or ignored by Government and in fact is probably being destroyed by government policy as we speak.

Regional museums per se, as I said, are major drivers for tourism. They do bring dollars to regional towns. In our case we bring about 9,000 visitors a year; obviously that generates a bit of income for the city of Lithgow. We have not seen, not heard about and not been involved in any State strategy or action plan to do with museums. We get the view, given that there is an absence there, that the level of knowledge within Government about museums is probably less than what it should be. I have been with the museum now for three years and I have never seen anyone from Government come and talk to us about the intrinsic significance that we hold and have. The unannounced changes to the 2017 firearms legislation pertaining to museums was like a sledgehammer with no current or future benefit. It should never have happened. We stand opposed to what took place. In our view our museum—and possibly others—should be excluded from the provisions of the Firearms Act.

Regional funding for museums per se is probably underdone. Yes, we do have grants; grants are probably hit-and-miss exercises. But there is no dedicated funding for organisations like ours and others which have an national or international standing or show promise to achieve such. Lastly volunteers, which we have a few of, do a great job and are the backbone of our organisation, plus many others. They need the support that we can give them—the vision, the skills training and the professional support that is required to make them longstanding in terms of the way they work with us and also with other museums. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Sommers?

Ms SOMMERS: Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence today and to do that via video link. I appreciate that. I am here today not only as a representative of the Port Macquarie Museum but also as a representative of the many community-operated, independent museums—you have referred to them earlier today as volunteer-run—across our State. Many of us hold and are responsible for, as Mr Benedet has just indicated, collections of great significance to the people of New South Wales, many of which are also national treasures. This continues to be either ignored or overlooked in State Government policy and funding in relation to museums and collections. For example, three of the 10 items added to the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register last year are in the custody of community collecting organisations based in regional New South Wales.

We note many submissions to this Committee have continued to espouse the value of touring exhibitions and these are certainly of importance, value and interest—but not at the expense of exhibitions that tell local stories. Residents of and visitors to regional New South Wales want to discover and understand regional history and identity and where we fit in the bigger picture. There are so many unique and important objects and their stories in community museums waiting to be discovered and shared. For many years now we have heard plans of great things for the sector: hubs, spokes, nodes and networks that will create a vibrant and exciting sector. The rhetoric has not been supported or made possible by the continuing ad hoc and piecemeal grant and support programs offered to community museums—and, indeed, inadequate funding to the sector as a whole.

The term "digitisation" has been used widely and liberally across the sector of late. One of my colleagues, an archivist, often says, "Arrange, describe, then digitise." This also applies to our collections—assess, document, digitise. The real value of digitisation is in sharing a story and not just the photograph or image. We have been sharing our collection digitally for the past 10 years. People contact us from all over the world because of our digitisation work—which, I might add, is a work in progress. But they are not finding us because we posted a

photograph on the internet. They are finding us because we are taking the time to properly research, document and share our collection's stories, connections and context together with that digital image. The value of digitising collections is clear. The real cost of digitising collections needs to be fully understood and properly funded. Outcomes of the previous inquiry into museums and galleries in New South Wales were underwhelming for us. Our vision for the future does include a statewide museum strategy with dedicated funding and regionally based paid staff to support and implement that strategy. We remain ambitious about our future. Thank you.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Mr Benedet, you mentioned a conflict with the State Government involving the Firearms Act. What happened involving the small arms museum?

Mr BENEDET: When the changes were made in late 2017 we did not get to know those changes until a year later. We were never consulted in any of the discussions that occurred leading up to the new regulations. We were never contacted afterwards and we only found out by accident through the Gunnedah museum that certain changes had been made. Once we heard about the fact that we had to go from a temporary deactivation to a permanent deactivation of firearms, that meant that affected 70 per cent of our collection.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: When you say "deactivation" do you mean wreck them?

Ms WHITE: Destroy.

Mr BENEDET: Destroy the value of what we have in the museum. We have about 2,600 or 2,700 firearms and 70 per cent of those would have been destroyed under the legislation. Now this legislation currently talks about permanent deactivation. That is still in place.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Had your organisation had a problem with people breaking in and stealing or people misusing the firearms in your facility?

Mr BENEDET: There has been not one incident.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Governments do not operate in a vacuum. Why would they do something like this? Why would they enact legislation like this?

Mr BENEDET: They did operate in a vacuum on this occasion. No museum was consulted.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: But they do not just have thought bubbles, or was this a thought bubble?

Mr BENEDET: It was someone's thought bubble.

The CHAIR: This was exactly a thought bubble. It was promulgated in secret.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Sorry, Mr Chair, I would like to hear it from the witnesses.

The CHAIR: I had a lot to do with this. I will let the witness speak but I would like to echo what he says.

Mr BENEDET: It was someone's thought bubble. I do not know whose thought bubble it was. It is obviously a thought bubble that has gone completely wrong.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: So you are telling me that since 1996 you have never had someone break in and steal or fire a gun illegally on your premises?

Mr BENEDET: Not at all, and the reason is because we carry the highest level of security and safety in the museum. That is prescribed under the Act.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: One of the key problems you have is that there is no category that is applicable to you as a museum that recognises the nature of the museum as opposed to a private collector or a firearms dealer. Have you spoken with the Government about getting a separate category from a museum?

Mr BENEDET: Clause 59 says "museums" under the Act, right? That is in law right now. We have spoken to Government many times about the fact that museums should be exempt. They were exempt pre-2017. That is publicly owned museums but privately owned ones were not.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Sommers, were you nodding in agreement? Is there something you would like to add? Is there something that you are aware of?

Ms SOMMERS: No, I am just agreeing that no-one was consulted.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: It is important because Hansard does not see nodding. I saw you nodding and I thought you were in agreement.

The CHAIR: Mr Benedet, would you explain how you found out what happened and what did happen to the Gunnedah museum?

Mr BENEDET: In the Gunnedah situation, the new provisions came in in November 2017. In December 2018 the Gunnedah museum contacted us for advice as to what they should do because they had just had the police on their doorstep saying that they were in breach of certain regulations, of which they were not aware. It was from December 2018 into the early part of 2019 that we got to know what was happening. We met with the previous police Minister and echoed our concerns and frustration. Then there was a new government and we sat down with the current police Minister, Minister Elliott, and explained the whole thing to him again in total. We put forward positions around the definition of museums and how they should be classified and obviously the fact that it got to a situation where we were asked whether an exemption would be suitable to be exempted from the provision of permanent deactivation. That is where we are right now. That is a halfway house for us because it does not suit and it should not suit museums.

Museums are categorised in the same form as being a collector/firearms dealer even though we are not. We are a different species but that different species is not reflected at all in the consideration under law, nor is it reflected in the thinking of politicians and advisors around firearms and museums. The case we made in the submission and verbally today is that museums are a breed of institution that live for the community educationally, historically and culturally, and the fact that I cannot see that being for a firearms dealer or a collector or a farmer. I am trying to get that message across. I am not saying all museums. There are 63 classified museums with permits in New South Wales; not all of those 63 are apples with apples. We have put forward to the Minister, his advisers and also to registry what we believe the definition of a "museum" should be under the law.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Just at the moment you have an exemption?

Mr BENEDET: We have.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: A discretionary exemption granted by the Minister?

Mr BENEDET: We have.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But there is no bespoke arrangement in place dealing with museums as distinct entities from collectors and that is where you would like it to go?

Mr BENEDET: That is right and also the fact that under the law the police commissioner has the right to cancel that exemption at his or her will without any reason.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And that kind of arbitrary threat hanging over your collections obviously is something you would like to see resolved?

Mr BENEDET: We are in no-man's-land currently in terms of the way the law is because we are not treated as a museum per se, even though we are under clause 59. In terms of the fact that the commissioner has the right to cancel an exemption, in fact, we have the police coming in next Monday to review all of our collection, hopefully we will then get to the next level of a permit exemption for the next few years with annual audits. Nonetheless, the situation we have right now is that we are in no-man's-land as a museum. The other more important thing is there is no distinction between us as a museum, for the Gunnedah museum or any other museum compared to, say, a firearms dealer who probably has less requirements on him or her to operate. They operate in a live situation and we do not.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You would be fine with police oversight and some kind of police auditing but against principles and structures put in place for a museum as opposed to a firearms dealer and recognising the public nature of your institution, is that where I understand you are at?

Mr BENEDET: Yes.

Ms WHITE: The Government mandates the security standards that museums must meet and very few of these 63 museums that now have permits meet those standards.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You have no problem with those standards being set?

Ms WHITE: No problem whatsoever.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And then meeting standards designed for a museum?

Ms WHITE: Yes.

Mr BENEDET: That is right

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can I ask a question about the 63 museums: Are they small arms museums or are they museums that have firearms?

Mr BENEDET: Each of those museums has a firearm or firearms in them. Some I would say would be backyard operators, if that is the word, to an organisation like ours which is internationally renowned.

Ms WHITE: Some of those museums have a permit but the permit owner has the firearms on his permit, not on that museum's permit.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Are there comparable museums in New South Wales or in Australia that are small firearms museums similar to you or are you unique?

Mr BENEDET: We are by far the largest in New South Wales. Gunnedah, Uralla, there would be a few of those organisations that would have probably 30 or 40. We have, let us say, 2,600 firearms. The other museums I am talking about might have a total number of 50, 60, 30 or 25 firearms. That is the sort of difference. However, where the difference lies is that, for example, when we had two senior management of the registry visit our museum they were overwhelmed by what we had. Ms White and Kerry Guerin behind me are two experts in this field in terms of firearms, technical information and those sorts of things. As I said, the officers of registry were actually taken aback by what they saw. The firearms collection, the vast diversity of what we have, the archives that relate to the small arms factory itself that go back to 1910—all of those sorts of things are all intertwined. That is what we try to work out and say to the Government, "We are a museum for the community. We are not here for personal gain like others are."

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Sommers, as a volunteer curator I just want to make sure that the word "volunteer" is the adjective describing "curator". So you are a voluntary curator?

Ms SOMMERS: I am unpaid.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Yes, I just wanted to make sure that the adjective was in the right place.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: You do not curate the volunteers.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Yes.

Ms SOMMERS: Everything I do is professional but I am unpaid.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I understand that. I am very well aware of that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That sounds like the industry.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: What is the success rate of your organisation in securing government grants? I know you received a grant under the Regional Cultural Fund for a master plan but what is your track record on securing government grants?

Ms SOMMERS: We have quite a good track record of acquiring grants. Let us be frank though, most of them are quite small, they are all project based. We do have a very good track record in securing grants but that takes an enormous amount of time. It has taken many, many, many years to get that skill up to being successful. For example, during COVID I have spent most of my time securing grants for ourselves and a couple of other organisations.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: If we were to make a recommendation or urge the Government to change practices, what practices should be in place to help museums like yourself secure grants or get assistance? Is there something that we could recommend that the Government should do?

Ms SOMMERS: I guess one of the current problems is that we are quite good at getting small grants but what we really need now are the bigger grants. We are sort of down a pathway where we have outgrown many of the small grant programs that are offered to community museums. There really is not a pathway or even a program that will enable us; give us a bit of a step up or a hand up to participating at a greater level. People can learn how to do grants. Quite simply, it is answer all the questions. That is always a good start. But there are not really any programs. At the moment for us with the Create NSW grants, for example, we are creating with the galleries, with individual artists and with screen organisations. The actual bucket of money, let us be frank, is very small. The expectations are enormously high and the bucket of money is very small, so it is highly unlikely for us to be able to secure funding of that nature.

In regards to infrastructure grants—and the Regional Cultural Fund was a fantastic initiative—the problem is now, though, where to next? There is not another bucket of money. There is nothing to follow through on, for example, our master plan project. Obviously it was a good idea for us to do the master plan and schematic

design to envisage and transform our museum for the next century, but where are we going to get the next lot of funding? Obviously we will be looking at philanthropy and other things but we will need some government support.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Ms Sommers, to put this in context, I am from Tamworth—sort of close but over the hill. It seems to me—and this applies with the Lithgow museum as well—that what is being identified is the need for a grants program that deals with regionally significant museums that, in a sense, picks winners of the more significant museums that are scattered about the State. Is that what you are identifying?

Ms SOMMERS: Sure, absolutely. We really are a regional museum. We happen to be totally owned and run by volunteers. We own our land, our buildings and our collection. In other places the council will probably chip in and help support that entity. Our museum has been going really before councils started getting involved. Our museum has been going since 1957. That has been a bit of a problem for those really well established museums. We provide regional services. We seek grants, we get grants and we run professional development opportunities for volunteers—and paid staff, I might add—from other neighbouring towns. So we are already providing that service and we already have the collection to substantiate our status. But what we do not have is any council support or funds that would help us. That is another issue with Create NSW grants: If the State Government is going to put money into grant programs or projects through Create, there really is an expectation from them that the local council is providing a cash contribution to that project. That is very difficult for us at the moment.

The CHAIR: How does the Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum sit in that context? I seem to remember that back in 2016 or something when we visited you there was some talk that Thales was going to perhaps remove you from the building you were in or that that was coming to an end.

Mr BENEDET: No, we are still there. The situation between us and Thales Australia is that they own the site, we obviously use the museum and adjoining buildings and we are in discussions with them to acquire the museum and two adjoining buildings off them. It has been an ongoing discussion for two years now. Hopefully Thales can get their act together quickly and sort that out but that is where we are. There is no issue about us being kicked off the site, if that is what you are asking. Can I just add to that issue. There are two things for me. One is each museum has its own quality, whether they are large, small or what have you.

I suppose where we are coming from is that I am not too sure if anyone has done a review of museums in New South Wales in the context of regional museums, looking at the significance of what they have and hold and international ability to grow that museum to something that is going to be a really world-class effort. I think, just going back to what Ms Sommers said and something that we also mentioned in our submission, that if you are going to be providing funding, current fundings are grants and they are chopped up into bits and pieces. That can still suffice but if you had a regional fund that purposely drove the growth of those museums that have been earmarked for world-class action, that is what I think would be a great thing to have.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Mr Benedet, that is where I was going. I go to various towns here and overseas and I have to say some small museums are great, others might be an hour of your life lost.

Mr BENEDET: Could I also add that when you look at the funding regime, you have got the department of environment, you have got Create NSW, you have got gambling New South Wales and some other outfits, and plus you have got the Federal Government. You think, "Well, if New South Wales was really, genuinely behind museum growth, then wouldn't you from a funding viewpoint channel resources so you have one organisation that coordinates the whole lot?" As it is now, obviously our respective organisations here track certain things but would it not be good to have one agency that actually is out there supporting museums and then be able to work as a unit across government to make that happen? Currently, it is dispersed and I think there are even conflicts. I would take the regulatory framework conflict that we have with firearms; on the other hand, I have got a government agency that puts out money. But it does not come together.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I accept that but perhaps part of that is the nature of government. I am attracted by this concept of a regional museums fund separate from the others. I ask this of all the witnesses: How would you identify the qualifying factors for who could apply? Who would be successful in accessing that style of fund?

Mr BENEDET: The museums that have got the national/international reputation would have had a significance assessment done on them in terms of their collection and archives. That would be number one. That would then demonstrate clearly the potential of that museum to grow. I think that would be a starting point and then obviously the resources that are in that museum in terms of their ability to grow and their volunteers. To me, the nub of this exercise is about the significance of the value of what the collection holds educationally and

culturally and to be able to educate and train people—the history of it. I could easily say the Lithgow Small Arms Factory is a great example of history of Australia in New South Wales and Lithgow and the museum carries on that tradition in time. With what we have got now—both firearms and machinery, which we did not have back in 2016 when we put those together—that would make it probably the most fundamental museum of its type anywhere in the world.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Ms Sommers?

Ms SOMMERS: I certainly agree. There are certain criteria that you would use. I think you would base it largely around collections. I see regional museums, if you like—dare I say, a bit of a spoke. I do see regional museums being a spoke of a State museum. For example, our collections are very compatible and complementary to the Powerhouse Museum collection, and I personally view it as our State museum. Why do we not change its name? But our museum also has unique objects relating to Port Macquarie's early settlement and, indeed, the early settlement of the colony of New South Wales and therefore Australia. There is definitely criteria that could be used. What worries me is that you are talking about a regional museum strategy without talking about an overall strategy. I come back to the fact that I really think we need to have the bigger picture sorted before we talk about what flows under that. What is really holding it all up—that is what is concerning me at the moment.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: In my own defence in that regard, apart from the fact that we both come from reasonably sized regional centres, my questioning arose out of your identification of essentially competing with such a plethora of different sized and differently focused organisations. That seems to be, in my defence, one of the reasons that I am attracted to identifying a funding path that is, in a sense, separate for organisations of the size and capacity of your two organisations. I will not say anything more at this point.

Ms SOMMERS: The model this morning did talk about the State Library model and it is certainly a model that could apply to museums.

Mr BENEDET: Just a comment: I hope we do not come across as saying that we are competing against one another as museums. We all have our own bits and pieces, our own history, our own individuality about ourselves. I think what we are saying is that every museum, as long as it has got that history, deserves a go. If you are going to go down the track of a regional fund that tries to promote and grow museums to an international, world-class standard, I would support that entirely.

The CHAIR: Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum is a technology museum in essence, isn't it?

Mr BENEDET: It is.

Ms WHITE: It is also a social history museum, very much so.

The CHAIR: Yes. You would be aware that there is new law that is currently going through or attempting to go through the upper House that will deal with your precursor equipment at the museum.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It is not moving real fast at the moment.

The CHAIR: No, it is not going very fast at the moment.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is another inquiry, Chair.

The CHAIR: That is another inquiry but it is significant to understand that this museum has not only firearms but also all the so-called "precursor"—that is a terrible word—technology also on display and subject to restoration on a long-term project. In that sense, I am talking about technology being similar to the MAAS. It is, if you like, just part of the same manufacturing history of New South Wales, if not Australia.

Mr BENEDET: We have made a submission to that inquiry. We do not understand it, quite frankly, and do not understand the reasoning. One of the questions here today, the first question, was whose thought bubble was that. I do not know, again, on this particular issue whose thought bubble that was.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You do not know what its precursor was.

Mr BENEDET: That is right.

The CHAIR: I think at the end of the day you are probably on the same page as Ms Sommers in relation to the long-term, ongoing funding of museums according to the requirement using a library-type model.

Mr BENEDET: Sorry, what is a library-type model? I don't know what that is.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is recurrent per capita funding.

The CHAIR: Recurrent funding—

Mr BENEDET: Yes.

The CHAIR: —rather than project by project.

Mr BENEDET: Yes.

The CHAIR: Has the small arms factory museum received grants in the past?

Mr BENEDET: We have. We have been successful with seven in the last, say, three years. Of the seven, five were government and two were private. We also missed out on four government grants.

The CHAIR: How many were from Create NSW?

Mr BENEDET: We have submitted one for zero return.

The CHAIR: So you have had nothing from Create NSW.

Mr BENEDET: From Create NSW, no.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Ms Sommers, I might ask you—and, Mr Benedet, then I will ask you—because this library funding model has been raised, I suppose I am asking you to comment. The library funding model involves, as I understand it, a per capita funding of local government for the provision of libraries. That is just my understanding. But your organisation and Mr Benedet's organisation are not local council, are they? I think in, say, Port Macquarie there is more than your museum. If you going to have a per capita funding in a particular area, how are you going to divide up that per capita funding between your museum and the others, and similarly in your area, Mr Benedet, between your facility, the ones in Bathurst, and those scattered in between? I see the attraction of talking about the library funding model. I just do not quite know how it fits comfortably when you are talking about a much more diverse group of organisations that are not local government but actually independently controlled, different sizes and doing different things.

Ms SOMMERS: Yes, thank you. I guess we have maybe got our wires crossed a little bit.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Mine are always crossed.

The CHAIR: His eyes are too.

Ms SOMMERS: Again, thank you. First of all, we are the Port Macquarie Museum. There are other museums in Port Macquarie; they specialise in different aspects of history. We are the museum of Port Macquarie but, on a serious note, the State Library funding model—and I guess maybe it is that we have got our wires crossed—is a model that comes from a State strategy around library services. The State Library takes responsibility for overseeing standards and how that applies. That is really where I am coming from when we talk about a State-overseeing strategy.

The per capita funding—I know our local government would say that libraries have consistently been cost-shifted to local government. They would be concerned if they were listening in now because they would think, "Oh my god, they are going to make us fund a museum as well." We are not talking necessarily about a per capita model. What we are talking about is an overall strategy that identifies what museums are really intending or intended to do and how they are going to be funded and, if you like, what professional standards are going to be consistently applied. That is really the model that I would like to see because at the moment there is no strategy. I mean, we are talking about a new Powerhouse Museum, for example, but not in the context of an overall strategy or how we all relate to one another.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Ms Sommers, I think I agree with you in regard to the need for a strategy, although that might get me into trouble. But part of the discussion this morning has been along the lines of moving from grants funding to recurrent funding, covering not only capital items but ongoing staffing and other operating costs. In that context, they have talked about the library funding model, which is the per capita model. Again, it is in that context that I ask a question. I accept the need for a strategy, but if you are going to move to a library funding model which is per capita based, the difficulty that I see—and I say this in front of the other members here—is that unlike libraries, which are local government owned and operated, your organisations are not. It is going to involve in some way divvying up a pie in terms of that money, which libraries do not have as a problem.

Mr BENEDET: In my view, I do not think the library model works for us or works for museums per se. If you look at the way that the publicly or taxpayer-funded museums are funded now—I am not too sure how they are funded now but they are funded in some form—it is ongoing work.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Indeed.

Mr BENEDET: Is there a basis on which you could look at that and say, "This is the way that these museums operate now under a taxpayer-funded model. Could we apply any of that?" We are happy to provide advice to this Committee on our thoughts after this meeting on what we think would be a suitable model that applies to regionally based museums.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you want to take that on notice, that would be extremely helpful.

Mr BENEDET: Yes, I will do that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have looked at the submissions and listened to the evidence and no-one has yet been able to persuade me that there is any kind of rational basis upon which the current funding is made.

The CHAIR: No, there is none.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It is historical and it is picking winners. I do not think that there is any surprise in that regard. It is a question of who is the winner.

The CHAIR: And if there is an election coming up.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Indeed, that is probably right.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will start with the witnesses in the room and then I will go to Ms Sommers on WebEx. Putting to one side whether or not library funding is the right model, is the big issue here the need for predictable, long-term recurrent funding?

Mr BENEDET: Absolutely but in the context of recurrent funding that actually achieves an outcome, not recurrent funding that just churns over year by year—so to be able to go from an A to Z outcome based on an ongoing program.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So recurrent funding which puts obligations on institutions to actually deliver a positive outcome for the public?

Mr BENEDET: Absolutely right—to deliver, grow and become that world-class institution that then brings in tourists and other forms of support.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ms Sommers?

Ms SOMMERS: Let's call it something else, let's call it a vertically integrated funding model.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I like that.

Ms SOMMERS: One that funds from the top and then disperses. It concerns me when we talk about recurrent funding because it can mean different things to different people. I think that what we need across the State is paid staff to help support volunteer museums. I effectively do the job of a paid person at the moment. I am not planning to do that for the rest of my retirement. I see the need. It really comes down to collection. It is not about whether someone can pay their electricity or not. It is really about how important their collection is and the story that it tells as well as the economic and social needs within those regions. That brings me back to the overall strategy and some sort of vertically integrated funding. We need recurrent funding, yes, but what we really need is paid people. I have spent a lot of time and effort getting grants for training programs. I also mentor and train many volunteers across our region, and indeed across the State and beyond. The nature of volunteering means that we come and go. We do not have to be there. Having paid people who provide some consistency and who truly support all of our volunteers would make an enormous difference to the standards of what you see when you visit a country museum.

Mr BENEDET: I would support what Ms Sommers has said. One of the conditions would be that you would have to grow into a size of museum that allows paid staff to be involved.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I had assumed that it was something that Museums & Galleries of NSW is responsible for. You have this almost entirely State-funded public entity which is meant to be out there as an advocate for small- and medium-sized museums and galleries. I had assumed that was part of the task of that entity.

Ms SOMMERS: I have never seen anybody advocate very well with their funding body when they are reliant on it. I make that comment up-front. Museums & Galleries of NSW are a service organisation. They provide some support and some programs. They also provide a standards program and a museum adviser program. It was that museum adviser program that really enlisted me, if you like, into what I do now. But it is inconsistent. It relies on local government buy-in as well. Not every museum in New South Wales has access to a museum adviser. The adviser is just an adviser. They are not there to do the work. The work that I do with collections, digitising and

documenting their stories, is really hard work. Not many people want to do it. In fact, most volunteers do not want to do that work. They are quite happy to open the museum but they do not want to take the work home at night. They do not want to be trying to solve how to pay the electricity bill next week or how to make the museum COVID Safe. They just want to support the local community and share their passion, love and knowledge of history. But they do not want to do the hard stuff, and that is really why we need paid people to do that. Museums & Galleries of NSW [MAG] are not funded sufficiently to do that either.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I do not have a view on it one way or the other but is that a structure that you could graft onto some of these workers, like the curators and the digitising team? Could you graft that onto the existing structure of Museums & Galleries of NSW? Or would you be better off getting a fresh structure, like Museums Victoria, or whatever structure you think would be appropriate.

Ms SOMMERS: I would really like to see the separation of museums and galleries in terms of service delivery, no matter the entity they go through. The work is quite different. I did outline that quite specifically in our submission to the Committee.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: For the record, I am persuaded by that argument. I do not know about the balance of the Committee. The work of galleries and museums is quite distinct.

Ms SOMMERS: Yes, so I would like to see it separated. I would really like a clean slate.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What about the Museums Victoria model? I know that the institutions in New South Wales are more geographically disparate so it may not be a perfect like for like, but is that a better starting point than Museums & Galleries of NSW?

Ms SOMMERS: Yes, but the real reason is not just the entity. It is the overall State strategy. That is really the difference.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The fact that they have a strategic plan, for example.

Ms SOMMERS: Absolutely.

Mr BENEDET: A strategic plan for museums?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes. It is an eight-year strategic plan for museums. I assume that you would welcome that in New South Wales?

Mr BENEDET: Absolutely, yes.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I am trying to get my head around this very strange firearms regulation issue. I assume that the reason you got thrust into this challenging situation was because the Government was concerned about security?

Mr BENEDET: We were told it was due to something like public safety.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Okay, so a similar sort of thing.

Mr BENEDET: We asked the question, that was the answer given and that was it.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: To be totally clear, I am utterly convinced by your argument that museums should be able to have operational firearms. I am not coming from a negative point of view at all, I am just trying to understand. You talk about a range of requirements that a museum should fulfil, and if they do then you think that they should be able to own and exhibit firearms?

Ms WHITE: Yes.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: One requirement, I would assume, would be the need for an appropriate level of security?

Ms WHITE: Yes.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Can you talk about what you think would be an appropriate level and what you would do to alleviate any potential fears from the Government or the community?

Ms WHITE: The level of security is there now in the rules and is provided by Back to Base Alarm Monitoring. There are rifles or other weapons attached to the walls by secure cable and the glass cases have to be 6.38 millimetres thick, so the rules are there. We go a bit above the rules and we are always innovating to try to find other ways to make things safe. At the moment we are thinking of a way of blocking the breech of a rifle so

that its integrity is not destroyed. We are also talking about radiofrequency identification [RFID]. We are always looking at other means of security because we do not want our weapons stolen.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: How long has your museum been in existence?

Ms WHITE: Since 1996.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Have you ever had a weapon stolen?

Ms WHITE: No. I do not know of any other museum in New South Wales—

The CHAIR: Can you explain to the Committee the difference between the current temporary disablement and what the Government is envisaging doing?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Because the question was about inoperable and maybe we should be careful of the terms.

Ms WHITE: Okay. So temporarily inoperable is removing a part, such as a firing pin, or it may be if the object is under glass, it may be holding the trigger back somehow so that it cannot be fired. Usually it is removing a part. If the weapon is stolen the person cannot take it away. They have got to either find or build a part to complete the weapon. Permanent deactivation is welding of the barrel, both ends, putting a steel rod down it, welding at both ends, welding every single moving part internally and externally.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: What is the point of having it then?

Ms WHITE: Yes, exactly. It is completely destroyed. And it has to be seen to be also inoperable—

The CHAIR: I acknowledge that interjection.

Ms WHITE: —so that means ugly welds along the edge. They can never be researched again, they can never be enjoyed again.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I am sorry to interrupt you but you must have actually destroyed significant historical firearms to meet this requirement?

Ms WHITE: No, we will not do it.

The CHAIR: They refuse to do it.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: But under that logic, battleaxes from the middle ages should have their blades cut off and things like that.

Ms WHITE: Terrorists can use a bus or a car to run into a crowd. Why not go to the Bathurst museum and destroy their cars? It just makes no sense whatsoever. Then the exemption comes along. How are they suddenly safer now because the commissioner said, "Okay, your firearms are fine". It just does not make sense.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am worried about HMAS *Otway*.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Rather than it being an exemption for each museum or each facility, what you are suggesting is that in order to be able to exhibit and own firearms you should have to meet a certain standard and then it should be automatic, rather than it being at somebody's discretion?

Ms WHITE: We gave the police commissioner a list of things that we suggested were the standards that a museum should meet to have a museum permit, and I do not know what has happened to that.

Mr BENEDET: That standard is an attachment to our submission.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: I have that here and I am really engaged in this issue. The final question I have is, I think you said there were 64—

Mr BENEDET: Sixty-three.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: —museums that exhibit firearms. In your opinion—and I am not asking you to name them, if you feel qualified and it is appropriate to answer this question—how many of those do you think should be exhibiting firearms in terms of fulfilling the required conditions? Obviously you have a terrific focus on security and what is appropriate and what your role and responsibilities are. If you feel appropriate to answer that question, I would be interested to know?

Mr BENEDET: Under the current definition in the Act, of the 63 I think that probably no more than a dozen of those 63 would fulfil every criterion that is under the Act. If I give an example now, say if I am a publicly taxpayer-funded museum with firearms, one of the criteria as a permit is that you need to exhibit that firearm.

Right? That is part of what it is, and be open. Many of the publicly funded museums do not exhibit firearms. They are in a basement. They are gathering dust.

The CHAIR: That is the case with the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in the Hargrave building. They have an extensive collection, all in original condition, but not on exhibit.

Mr BENEDET: In a way, if a permit came up for a taxpayer-funded museum today, that museum should not be given a permit because they do not exhibit firearms, under the definition of the current law, as an example. And there are many other museums much smaller than ours that would struggle to meet every condition required. That is the argument we have put to the police commissioner, police Minister and also to the registry about redefining museums under the Act to be very clear around what is expected of those museums. Currently the safety is important, and obviously we are at a level 8 or level 9 and we have had no issue.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Benedet, we can all agree that security and safety is paramount when we are talking about firearms.

Mr BENEDET: Absolutely, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And you would support a set of standards that are audited by the NSW Police to ensure that security and safety is guaranteed?

Mr BENEDET: No problem.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The issue that you have is that to the extent that they are historical artefacts, the idea that you would be permanently damaging them is something that you find—

Ms WHITE: I would not do it. I am the custodian in charge of them—

Mr BENEDET: We would not do it.

Ms WHITE: —and I just would not do it. I would go to jail, instead of—you know, I just would not.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Let us try not to get there.

Mr BENEDET: Do not go to jail yet, okay.

Ms WHITE: I just will not do it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you willing to sit down and meet with the Firearms Registry and work through these issues so we can ensure that public safety is maintained and come up with a rigorous system that is more rigorous than just one-off, ad hoc exemptions?

Mr BENEDET: We sat down with the commander of the registry before COVID happened and went through in detail for one day about the issue that you raised just then. COVID hit and we have not been in touch.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I assume that is still on the table?

Mr BENEDET: Absolutely.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You are happy to sit down—

Mr BENEDET: It is a good question. Absolutely. And we have got no problem doing that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Surely if we are talking about public safety, a set of identified criteria that can be met and then audited is a better public safety outcome than ad hoc exemptions?

Ms WHITE: Yes.

Mr BENEDET: That is true. Under the current regime annual audits by the police department is part of the deliverables, I suppose.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do we know what they are auditing you against?

Mr BENEDET: Do not know yet, because we have not as yet—we have been given a so-called exemption but the exemption that carries for us for the next few years will happen hopefully next month. Hopefully I will tell you back then.

The CHAIR: Is it true to say that the Firearms Registry's tick box, for example, is opaque and that you do not know what they are checking you against?

Mr BENEDET: That is true.

Ms WHITE: It depends on what the commissioner wants. The commissioner is in charge of—

The CHAIR: Has there been any change in your perception of the profile of public safety in relation to your collection that you would acknowledge? In other words, what has changed in the nature of risk?

Ms WHITE: Nothing.

Mr BENEDET: There has been nothing.

Ms WHITE: If the commissioner says they are exempt, they are suddenly safer than they were yesterday.

The CHAIR: Is it true then to say that perhaps this is being done on a whim?

Ms WHITE: I do not really know why it is being done. I think there may be an agenda, I do not know. I cannot understand why they would attack museums.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Have there been any thefts from other museums—

Ms WHITE: I don't know of any.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: —that you are aware of in the last, say, decade?

The CHAIR: Obviously I am not giving evidence but I am not aware of any thefts of historical firearms from any museums in Australia.

Ms WHITE: Kerry Guerin just said there have been three incidents over the last 20 years that he has known of. But I think I know one of them.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Can you take that on notice?

The CHAIR: Take that on notice.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: And give us some details of what has and has not happened. Mr Benedet, this question is really directed at you but, Ms White, you may be able to make a contribution. Do I take your evidence to be that you would concede that some museums perhaps should not be displaying working firearms? Is there in a sense a legitimate concern that there is not adequate security at some?

Mr BENEDET: Absolutely right. And as was mentioned, we need a uniform level of safety that governs all museums. Right? And there is no grey or black, that is it. There is a minimum standard, and that is what it is now with level 8 and the security that we have to meet. Whether all museums, all 63, meet those requirements, I cannot tell you.

The CHAIR: Is it true to say that under the old regulation you had one museum licence for all your firearms in terms of their temporary deactivation, whereas what was being proposed was every firearm having to have a separate licence in relation to permanent disablement?

Ms WHITE: Could you just repeat that please?

The CHAIR: Under the old regulations, before they were changed in 2017, you had an effective museum licence for all your firearms.

Ms WHITE: Permit.

The CHAIR: In other words, each was not individually licensed. There may have been a list of them somewhere.

Ms WHITE: Each firearm registration—we also have a museum permit. That covers the registered firearms, it also covers the prohibited firearms. Now, that could be any number of prohibited firearms. They are not listed at all.

The CHAIR: That is right.

Ms WHITE: Yes, that does not make a lot of sense either.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The non-prohibited firearms are individually registered.

Ms WHITE: Need to be registered. So we can have rocket launchers, we can—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Prohibited firearms are done as a job lot.

Ms WHITE: That is it, yes. Rocket launchers, grenades, everything all in—well, not grenades, but yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That does seem perverse.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Sorry, we are talking over the top of other.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The firearms that you can have registered require individual registration.

Ms WHITE: They require individual registration.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But when it comes to rocket launchers and prohibited weapons—

Ms WHITE: They are lumped in as prohibited weapons on the prohibited weapons permit, so that is a separate permit.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And all of them are covered under the one permit.

Ms WHITE: No. There is the prohibited weapons permit and then there is the prohibited objects permit. They are quite aside from the weapons. Objects are like flak jackets, handcuffs and grenades.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: All of your prohibited objects are under one permit and all of your prohibited weapons are under another permit. Then each of your other firearms are on individual permits.

Ms WHITE: Yes. We do have two separate permits. Objects are not registered at all. There is no permit at all for those.

The CHAIR: Is it true to say that many of the 63 museums you are talking about are also private collections of firearms and related items, for example in an RSL club?

Ms WHITE: RSL clubs are different to museums but there are a lot of people who have a backyard shed with a lot of firearms. They just want a museum permit for reasons of their own and they have been given one in the past. They are not a true museum.

The CHAIR: Are you not talking about antique firearms collectors?

Ms WHITE: No. I am talking about people who have museum permits. Some of those 63 are just people in a backyard shed.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you believe that public museums should have a rigorous set of transparent and clear guidelines that need to be complied with under the firearms act?

Ms WHITE: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That may mean some of the 63 museums cannot comply with those, in which case they will have to dispose of the firearms or not display them but a subset will be able to comply with it and we can all be satisfied that public safety will be properly accounted for.

Ms WHITE: That would be ideal. In the past they have handed out permits that should not have been handed out, to my way of thinking. I agree with having a full rigorous set of guidelines. If you comply you can keep your firearms, if not—

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Ms Sommers, is there anything you would like to add?

Ms SOMMERS: Our museum is compliant with the firearms regulations but in talking to colleagues across the State I know that the police force assess the regulations somewhat differently in different areas. There is certainly some inconsistency in the application of the regulations at the moment.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I assume that a set of clear, transparent and rigorous standards that are applied uniformly across the State on firearms in museums would benefit everybody because you would have clarity and predictability.

Ms SOMMERS: Yes. We are happy with rigorous requirements for firearms and a lot of other things as well.

Mr BENEDET: You can have that as long as that rigour leads to an exclusion from the Act. There is no point going through that exercise and saying that you are given a five-year exemption. It does not mean anything to anyone.

The CHAIR: Can you please explain that? Exemption from what Act?

Mr BENEDET: Currently we have an exemption process in place under the law. If you are going to go down the track of looking at museums and be very clear around how they are defined and how they operate, those museums that fulfil that charter, in our view, should be excluded from the Act.

The CHAIR: Are you saying that at the moment you have a five-year exemption and you are expecting them to come back again five years from now?

Mr BENEDET: Absolutely. Hopefully next month we will get our five-year extension. They will come back every year after that for an audit and then we will have to reapply again in five years' time for another exemption.

The CHAIR: What is the logic in all of this?

Ms WHITE: That we have the possibility that the commissioner can at any time change his mind and say, "Well, you don't have that exemption anymore".

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Rather than an exemption, what if you had an express museums permit that you were granted? Then to maintain that permit you had to be in accordance with the conditions and requirements under the permit. Is that the way you want to proceed going forward?

Mr BENEDET: That is right, and we are excluded from those current provisions, which was the case pre-2017 for publicly funded museums.

The CHAIR: I am glad you have not been able to shed any light at all on why this rubbish has gone on. I suspect that I know what it is, but we do not need to canvas that here right now. We do have a little more time because we have had a cancellation. Mr Benedet, there are three documents you have handed up. Are you happy for them to be tabled and published?

Mr BENEDET: Yes. No problem.

The CHAIR: Ms Sommers, are there any other issues that you would like to talk to us about that we have not properly covered?

Ms SOMMERS: Digitisation is a favourite topic of mine, but I thought you might like to ask us about how we are doing during COVID and how the sector is going during COVID?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: How about we ask you that question then. What is happening with your operations and are you still opening your doors?

Ms SOMMERS: The Port Macquarie Museum only closed for 11 weeks. It closed on 18 March due to some sector advice, and in fact the day before we had so many overseas visitors through from the UK and the US that we were getting a bit toey. We reopened on 5 June with a COVID safety plan. We have had to make a lot of changes at our museum. We have worked for years to make things hands on, and we had to take out as much of that as we could and become hands off. I am actually running late for cleaning duties this afternoon. There has been a whole lot of added duties put on us, but I can say that at our particular museum only three of our 60 volunteers have not returned. They were all very eager to come back.

Even though numbers are a bit lower than last year, Port Macquarie has been very busy with tourists but I think they are somewhat reluctant to go into enclosed spaces. We have made a lot of changes. Many museums in our region have also opened, but there are also a number of museums within our region and beyond that are really struggling with how they are going to cope with COVID, so it is a concern. Some of them probably need a hand in navigating what needs to be done. It is alright for me to send them a link to the Health department advice and M&G NSW's and M&G Queensland's guidelines, but there are some museums out there who need you to tell them how to do it in their situation. It is quite a concern. The sector has issued guidelines but it really has not done any hand holding, which I know is not allowed, around how to reopen successfully.

The CHAIR: Mr Benedet and Ms White, do you have anything further you would like to add?

Ms WHITE: No.

Mr BENEDET: On the matter of inter-museum transactions, we have dealt with regional museums where we have provided some firearms to those museums for display. That has gone pretty well. There are codes of conduct and there are also guidelines around how that works. The issues we have had, though, are between ourselves at a regional museum and some taxpayer-funded museums, and because they are the high and mighty they take the view that they can put certain restrictions on us, which from our point of view does not work. When you talk about inter-museum transactions of objects, that needs to be looked at because there are a number of examples we have come across where it just becomes too hard to even contemplate. When you are dealing with regional museums it is completely different. It is not on the same page. If you are looking at a museum strategy, then one thing that needs to be sorted out is the issue of how museums work together and it comes to the transport or use of objects.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Would the concept of having a backbone of paid staff across regional New South Wales that museums could refer to, would that assist in transfers of objects between museums as well as the basic help that Ms Sommers said is needed to curate, digitise and even organise volunteers? Do you support the concept?

Mr BENEDET: I don't know. I suspect that the people we have dealt with have egos and those egos overwhelm the whole discussion.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Mr Benedet, could it be that in terms of some of those publicly funded museums that you refer to, and I cannot think of any in particular at the moment, that actually there is a core of staff in the museum that are not in favour of regional tours of materials from their museums?

Mr BENEDET: It could well be but others are. We know that the discussions we have had at senior level with certain museums it is like, "Well, who are you? I am so and so and you are an ant and I am the elephant. Why should I work with you?"

The CHAIR: I know how to deal with elephants.

Mr BENEDET: I think that type of ego stuff gets built up here and if you are going to break that mentality down then, even though there are processes in place, those processes do not work when that individual does not want to actually behave that way. We have numerous examples of things that are really historically important that currently sit in a basement in Sydney which if someone found out about it, it would be on the front page of a newspaper.

Ms WHITE: Or things that belong with our museum that they will not hand over to our museum in some cases.

Mr BENEDET: We had some years back the ballast of Captain Cook's *Endeavour*. The ballast, the pig iron, was brought up to the Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum to be refurbished. Of the 13 that were done, one was given to the factory as a thankyou for the work that they did. When the maritime museum found out that we had that one, they said that they wanted it back so that they could conserve it but they would give it back to us three months later. That was years ago. For us to get that back and to have that on display and exhibit that, because of the nature of what it was and what the factory did and currently where that sits now, those 13 items are in the basement. If that is good management practice, I think that is poor form.

Ms WHITE: This piece of ballast was actually at our museum long before the maritime museum existed.

The CHAIR: Just outline what ballast this is that you are talking about?

Ms WHITE: The Captain Cook ballast was brought up from the ocean.

The CHAIR: I know what "ballast" is.

Ms WHITE: When they first came they were encrusted with coral, so the factory took the coral off all the ballast and the six canon as well.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: This was recovered off the Great Barrier Reef?

Ms WHITE: Yes.

Mr BENEDET: Yes.

Ms WHITE: There were six canon as well. I think they went to Melbourne.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This is when they tossed everything overboard.

The CHAIR: When they refloated it.

Ms WHITE: Yes. They recalled this ballast from all small regional museums and when we asked for ours back they started demanding that we have all these conditions like temperature conditions and conservation type things. When it left our museum it looked perfectly fine. It is now sitting in the bottom of the maritime museum not on display and there are 40 of them.

The CHAIR: Effectively as ballast.

Ms WHITE: Yes, it is just a lump of metal like a pig iron metal. They all vary in sizes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But they are all together, not on public display, in a basement somewhere.

Ms WHITE: I assume they are all in the basement of the maritime museum.

The CHAIR: Effectively, you say they were taken from you and not returned?

Ms WHITE: No, they were determined not to return them.

The CHAIR: It is a sign of bad faith.

Ms WHITE: Snobbery, maybe.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think your point is this, is it not, they are treating you in a high-handed fashion. Even though they are not putting the artefact on display and they are not providing value for it, they see absolutely no value in you doing that and that is frustrating.

Ms WHITE: We had that in a display.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I think you could apply that to a lot of museums.

Ms WHITE: The factory also made 23 muskets for the soldiers in the re-enactment, so we had that ballast on display with that musket in a whole Captain Cook display. We still have the firearm that we had but we do not have the ballast to put with it anymore. People love to see it and our volunteers loved to point it out to people.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Putting to one side some of the issues around Captain Cook, there is something extraordinary about seeing an artefact from that moment, from that time, and that is what museums have and that is what they bring to many people. You are there right next to something that was tossed off the *Endeavour* at a particular time at a particular moment.

Ms WHITE: It is not about our museum, it is about the visitors' experience. The visitors have a right to see that sort of stuff.

The CHAIR: I will carry that point a little further. To the Hon. Trevor Khan's question, potentially are we saying there is a level of bureaucratic disdain for regional museums run by volunteers that perhaps forms around or obstructs the formation of good government funding policy? Does that make sense?

Ms WHITE: I think volunteers are very under-respected for the work that they do.

The CHAIR: If we were to make a recommendation like that, it would go into the hands of the very people that perhaps would be prejudiced against preparing it? You are nodding again, thank you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could I ask just one final question of Ms Sommers. It is about Create NSW as an entity for the advocacy and funding of museums. With your museum hat on, is Create NSW fit for purpose as the main public entity responsible for museums in New South Wales?

Mr BENEDET: I think Create NSW is more about the arts part of the equation. I think the museum part of the equation there is a big hole because there is a hole in the knowledge that they have. How can they promote something that they know very little about? That is my view on that.

Ms WHITE: They seem to lump museums in with culture but I think to them "culture" means theatre and art. Museums really belong in heritage.

Ms SOMMERS: I concur. I think the name itself is indicative of the direction that the department has taken. It need not, if you like, have left out the heritage part and our cultural material and our identity but that is definitely what has happened.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What do you think of the concept of going over to Heritage? Leaving Create NSW and going over expressly into a Heritage portfolio?

Ms SOMMERS: It concerns me because our collections include visual arts. Our collections include art and our collections include film. It bothers me that we might have to do that because where do you draw the line. Just because we are a social history museum does not mean we are not also an art museum or, dare I say, a firearms museum and lots of other things. It concerns me if it just heads in that direction as an easy out. I don't think it is the solution.

Ms WHITE: I disagree. I think museums need to be separated from arts. I seek every organisation that is meant to do the lot as an umbrella they head mostly towards the art or food and wine, as in the case of Destination NSW.

The CHAIR: You need to have a food and wine bar in the museum. Thank you for coming today. There are two questions on notice and the secretariat will be in contact with you in relation to those. You will have 21 days to respond. Sorry for the delay, technology let us down earlier, but I think we have filled the time.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

JAMES STANLEY COLMAN, Private citizen, consultant, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Sorry, we have had technical difficulties today. Do you want to make a short opening statement of a minute or two?

Mr COLMAN: Yes, I was told that I would have about three minutes, is that right?

The CHAIR: Some people take 20 minutes but we are being polite.

Mr COLMAN: I would appreciate a little leniency here. I think I will hit four.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You best get started.

Mr COLMAN: . I also have two documents which I would like to table and I also have a one page bio which is there. I brought 10 copies of each.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Please table the documents now so they can be distributed while you are making your statement.

Mr COLMAN: I am happy to do that. The first is a folio of research information which was put together by an expert heritage and archaeological consultant some years ago, Edward Higginbotham, and it deals with the landscape, heritage, history and the archaeology of North Parramatta, including the Female Factory and other facilities nearby. So that is an extract from a very authoritative report which I think you will find interesting. The second handout entitled "Images to accompany presentation" contains graphic material which I produced myself either with my own hands or using photocopiers and that sort of thing. The purpose of those items essentially is to give the Committee an idea of what the challenge for urban planners and designers is as we look at North Parramatta today.

There are a couple of maps which are self-explanatory, a couple of diagrams which are self-explanatory and the last item in that collection is a sketch which I prepared on the basis that at some time, at some stage, a government might decide to do some serious planning in North Parramatta. What I have suggested with that image is a boundary to a study area which could then be developed in detail. Within that study area, of course, lies the Female Factory, the jail and all the other heritage items. So those two folios are supportive of what I would like to say to the Committee.

Several years ago a well-known urban sociologist by the name of Richard Florida wrote extensively about what he called creative spaces. His message is directly relevant to your commission of inquiry. I think Florida would claim that museums are creative spaces, so my question is: Why not look at North Parramatta as having such a potential? When we talk about North Parramatta in this context we are talking about what could well be the oldest urban precinct in Australia. That might come as a surprise to some people but while they were romping around the Rocks, the marines are chasing the convicts, meanwhile free settlers were starting to establish themselves in Parramatta. So it is a part of Parramatta which, in turn, might reasonably be called Australia's second city.

If you want expert opinion on these matters, I refer you to Dr Carol Liston who is an associate professor in history at Western Sydney University. There surely could be no argument that Parramatta deserves its own museum. I say that within the area generally known as North Parramatta will be found an opportunity to create one such a unique riverside museum campus and cultural hub. This would be consistent with the city's recently adopted cultural plan. I do not know whether members of the Committee are aware of that document but a year or two ago the community of Parramatta produced a cultural plan and they argue strongly for something such as what I have in mind.

A civic enterprise like this would focus on Parramatta's Indigenous and post-colonial history. It would simultaneously celebrate local, metropolitan, State and national history and identity, all in one hit. No other Australian city can offer such an opportunity. So you have before you a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, an invitation to place before the governments at every level a strong case for creating a completely new kind of museum in North Parramatta. For the record, I am handing up a folio of extracts from Higginbotham. He will help you to understand what an incredibly rich cultural library we have got up there on the ground, under the ground and above the ground.

In the central business district to the south there are two simple, yet much-loved heritage buildings, and they sit on a beautiful riverside site. Sadly, Parramatta has lost much of its heritage but these two can be restored and conserved and posterity will be the beneficiary. I suspect that they are the only remaining heritage buildings enjoying a prime riverside site in the central business district. I stand to be corrected but I think that is the case.

So in my view that site and its buildings should be retained for civic purpose in perpetuity. Plans to demolish the buildings should be permanently abandoned.

My invitation today to this Committee is to think big, think creatively, think adventurously and think long term and send a strong message to Government that the moment has arrived for the creation of a new museum or cultural hub campus in North Parramatta, the place where the real urban Australia probably had its beginnings. To achieve this vision will present Australian heritage experts, designers, architects, planners, community builders, ordinary people and managers with a really challenging program which could run over many years and would create many, many jobs. Ideally these people would work to a master plan developed in consultation with all the stakeholders, led by members of the museum industry, if I can use that horrible word.

I make one more very important point to this Committee at the moment and it happens to be a point relating to a news item which came out on Monday this week. On Monday this week Parramatta City Council placed its plan for major central business district growth and expansion and zoning changes on public exhibition. That exhibition is now running. So if you want to see what the city council has in mind for the entire central business district, go to the exhibition. I have studied those plans and I have a very simple message for the Committee. It relates in particular to the impact of those plans on North Parramatta. If the plans for that part of the city which lie to the north of the river are gazetted, North Parramatta's future as a nationally significant heritage precinct will be dead in the water.

Why do I say that? Because commercial buildings as high as 26 storeys will march across the river along both sides of Church Street, creating another chunk of high-rise real estate. Such development will be totally alien to North Parramatta's character and potential. This potential is for a low-rise cultural and environmental counterpart to the big CBD to the south. You have got an opportunity for an environmental comparison—a contrast—and many, many cities have got these. You have got the big smoke and you have got the small smoke. It is in the small smoke where social activity can flourish. It is almost a 24-hour environment where the arts, the cultures, the cafe society and thousands of small businesses can work together. I hand up a folio of images, which you have already got, which will help to explain that proposition. This council initiative is truly a threshold moment for the city and for North Parramatta.

I urge you to direct the Government's attention to its implications for your inquiry. There is an opportunity for a courageous government to serve the public interest here—to kill two birds with one stone, so to speak—by intervening in the council's plans for North Parramatta. By that I mean State Government says, "You can have what you want south of the river but north of the river we have got to put it on hold until there is a proper study and plan done." Such a plan has never been prepared for North Parramatta, despite what the council will tell you. A zoning plan is not a proper urban plan. So put on hold the proposals for North Parramatta. At the same time that will offer this area a new future for a new kind of Parramatta—a cultural heart for the city with its own left bank and its own Latin quarter. Thank you for your time.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Mr Colman, are you proposing that the Powerhouse Museum be in or around what we call the Fleet Street precinct, the Female Factory precinct, in North Parramatta?

Mr COLMAN: First of all, I believe that the existing Powerhouse building should stay where it is. I believe that much of its collection should stay where it is. But there is a huge collection we have not seen; a lot of it is in storage. I think some of that could be decanted to what I am talking about as a new museum campus in North Parramatta.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Is that compatible with the proposal for World Heritage listing of the Female Factory?

Mr COLMAN: I think it is, yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Take me through that. How can that be navigated? Bear in mind I have been to the Forbidden City in Beijing, which has World Heritage listing, and in the middle is a Starbucks. I do understand that you can have commercial activity and World Heritage.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is not the best part of the—

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You told me it was when you were there.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I went there in 1988. I do not recall a Starbucks.

The CHAIR: Order! Please direct questions to the witness.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: My point is: Is World Heritage status for the Female Factory compatible with the Powerhouse Museum being in this area?

Mr COLMAN: I am not a museum expert but I know something about World Heritage. I do not think that a World Heritage listing would in any way inhibit the use of parts or all of that estate if it was a public endeavour and if it was in the public interest. If you are going to allow Disneyland to come in and put up a makeshift copy of the Taj Mahal, forget it. But World Heritage listing is a reputable path for distinction at the heritage level in global terms.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I was actually out there on Monday walking around the site, looking at the Female Factory. Where would it be in relation to the jail?

Mr COLMAN: I think it would be to the south of the jail. When we talk about where it would be, I do not have in mind a single building. I see a collection of buildings. Some might be new buildings on existing vacant land. Others would be recycled existing buildings. There are a lot of very ordinary, almost trashy little utilitarian buildings out there which could well go but there are also a collection of buildings that have a second life.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Can I just ask a quick follow-up? I just wanted to draw you out a little bit in terms of why the vision that you have described—which sounds good—is preferable to the proposition of putting the Parramatta Powerhouse in the Government's proposed location on the river? I just wondered in terms of your expertise as a town planner. What are the benefits of the proposal to put it on the Fleet Street site that are not able to be realised where it is currently proposed?

Mr COLMAN: Well, the CBD site, first of all, it is very small and access for large crowds of people and for vehicles will be always a trying proposition. As the CBD grows with more and more high-rise, there will be more and more congestion and so on. From an architectural point of view, I do not think a well-designed museum is a happy neighbour to commercial towers. The second point is that in the North Parramatta area there is room to grow. This could expand over the next 50 to 100 years. It is a long-term proposition. Look at what we have done here in Centennial Park, for example. It started off as almost just a local farm but it has grown and grown. However, you have to have expansion options.

You have also got to have—this is my utopian thinking—opportunities for a range of different designers and architects who can handle a big building and a local architect who can do a little gem which might be the size of this room. So there are opportunities for the creative industries, big and small. Furthermore, there is an existing landscape. It is a fascinating landscape out there. Higginbotham has identified some of the landscape assets—and when I say "assets" they are almost listed items in a heritage list. There are trees that have been planted there for nearly 200 years as well as all the other landscaping. Third, access to the river—at the city site access to the river is very tricky and it is very limited. In the case of North Parramatta you have got a continuous riverbank. You can hop over the river to Old Government House and the domain and Parramatta Park. It has this flexibility, if you like, plus the environmental charm of a riverside setting. I could go on and on.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Colman, one of the sets of documents are your images to accompany the presentation. The first one of that is the Parramatta City Centre Vision 2007. Is that a vision that you still see merit in, where the bulk of the development is on the southern side and the north side has a low-rise spine but otherwise low-rise development?

Mr COLMAN: Yes. I was astonished when I found that image in a council document. My inquiries led me to the conclusion that in the year 2007 the city council, the elected council, had this in mind. Now something has happened since then. There have been huge commercial pressures and a push by developers and so on to get real and turn that old CBD into a modern CBD. Something has happened which has effectively put that image on the backburner. But it gives you a good idea of what could happen if we go down the path of restricting CBD growth to the south and looking at the northern sector as a completely new blackboard where we can draw new things, we can create a new sorts of buildings and so on. So it is a nice little reminder of what was in the mind at 2007 and it could be the flavour of the future.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do I understand that you say maintaining that vision of a low-rise development on the north is the best way of ensuring the integrity of the heritage precinct that wraps all the way around the river bank on the north?

Mr COLMAN: Yes, with one proviso: that the planning should take heritage conservation as a priority, not as a leftover, not as an afterthought. The thing that would drive my vision for that area would be a vision based on the fact that here is some historic real estate which has no counterpart anywhere else in Australia. Let's build on that. We might have the odd high-rise building somewhere but that would come out of the plan.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is not a question of do no harm to the heritage precinct. It is to start with the heritage precinct, the distinct and extraordinary values that that has, and start your town planning from there and make North Parramatta flow from the heritage precinct.

Mr COLMAN: Yes. You do not want to treat it as a museum object to be untouched. You are building on some really good things. There is a lot of pretty ordinary stuff around there too. You are looking for the gems and you build on those.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In the context of this inquiry, one of the great linchpins for that heritage-led revival of North Parramatta could be an extraordinary world-class museum? That would be a great linchpin.

Mr COLMAN: Absolutely, yes. If I could just say, it would be a museum which would be close to all sorts of other things that relate to the core job of the museum. Going back to the earlier question about the city centre site, you cannot do that there.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Just like the Powerhouse relates to a powerhouse, something extraordinary in Parramatta could relate to the heritage fabric that is built in and around Parramatta?

Mr COLMAN: Yes, I think you are right.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I understand.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: My colleague Mr Secord touched on the idea that there would need to be some development of the site at North Parramatta in order to realise this vision. The site sits alongside very historic buildings that would seek to be World Heritage listed alongside the heritage status they already have. There is a bit of a history of adaptation, recycling and re-use at that North Parramatta site already, is there not?

Mr COLMAN: Yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Could you talk us through the idea of how using that site as a museum or cultural precinct draws on that history of adaptation and re-use of the site.

Mr COLMAN: Yes, okay. I will just remind the Committee that within the existing North Parramatta urban area there is quite a lot of capacity for growth under the existing plan. What the council is proposing is more but there is spare capacity town planning zones, that is within the urban area. If we go in the area which we are looking at as a possible museum precinct, there may be certain sites which could be sold off to a private developer for a use that is consistent with a museum complex. Other sites could be handed over to agencies or to the education department, for example. Some buildings are obsolete—okay, they go. A new building might come. There is an opportunity for a mix of commercial and public sector enterprises but nothing too big. The scale needs to be watched all the way. I am not sure whether I answered your question.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It is useful to reflect on—you used the word "flexibility"—the flexibility and versatility of that site. Some people might have it in their mind that as just a bunch of historic buildings and that really constrains the potential of it. It is useful to draw out that, in fact, it is quite underutilised right now. There is a lot of potential there for new and for more as opposed to just taking tours of people through the old buildings.

Mr COLMAN: We are not going to sterilise it. That is the main thing. That is not an option.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Thank you, Mr Colman.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming, Mr Colman.

Mr COLMAN: So I do not need another minute?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Was that your opening statement, Mr Colman?

The CHAIR: That was good. Conceptually I think it has legs.

(The witness withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 16:19.