

Museums & Galleries NSW

Recommendations towards a National Cultural Policy

Submission to Minister Garrett

Department of Environment, Water, Heritage & the Arts

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the key agency in NSW to develop, support and promote regional, community and public museums, galleries and Keeping Places, **Museums & Galleries NSW** is aware of issues significant to community well-being, creativity and cultural development that can be delivered by the museum and gallery sector across Australia.

Our primary recommendation is that consideration of the needs of the small to medium museum and gallery sector be included in the National Cultural Policy.

In this submission, we have identified a number of strategic directions that should be considered within such a policy. These include:

1. Sustainability

Sustainability is a key criterion for future investment in infrastructure and activity for the museum and gallery sector.

It is recommended that:

- The National Cultural Policy should address environmental and economic sustainability.
- Support and funding initiatives should be considered that develop a greater awareness of sustainable operations for cultural facilities and a greater understanding of the use of environmental and economically sustainable practices. This process should commence at the design stage of cultural facilities, and be inclusive of their ongoing operations.

2. Capital Infrastructure Development

It is recommended that:

- The Commonwealth Government continue to support the provision of cultural infrastructure.
- Federal funding for cultural infrastructure should be informed by a high level understanding of new community focused models for cultural delivery and a long term assessment of operational viability.

3. Audience evaluation and development

Audience development is key to enhancing the impact and community benefits of museums and galleries

It is recommended that:

- Ongoing and coordinated support of audience evaluation and development initiatives for small to medium museums and galleries should be maintained as a priority. This will enhance public engagement with cultural and heritage activities. Simultaneously the increase in awareness of audience requirements within cultural organisations will ensure greater benefits for the community.

4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and engagement in the National Cultural Policy should include consideration of relevant and appropriate connections with museums and galleries.

It is recommended that strategies embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and culture should include:

- Proper consideration of the importance of material that is held in museums and galleries
- The connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their heritage and materials currently held in museums and galleries
- The role that museums and galleries can play in supporting engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

5. Volunteer-run museums

Volunteer run-museums deliver an essential service to the community through their care of collections, and additionally support community well-being, beyond their role as museums.

It is recommended that:

- Support for volunteer museums should be incorporated into a National Cultural Policy, as these museums care for collections essential to informing Australia's heritage and identity. Involvement in the volunteer museum movement also creates the opportunity for individuals to participate in the community, undertake life-long learning and enhance healthy community lifestyles.

6. Collections

Small to medium museums and galleries are the caretakers of aspects of the distributed national collection and this role should be recognised in the cultural policy.

It is recommended that:

- The National Cultural Policy should embrace the relevance and care of aspects of the distributed national collection housed in community and small to medium public museums and galleries. The policy commitment to support this collection should also provide the strategy and means for its identification, documentation and preservation.

7. Tourism

Cultural and heritage tourism initiatives should be included within the National Cultural Policy.

It is recommended that:

- Inclusion of a tourism strategy for significant support of regional economic development through the museum and gallery sector should be considered in the development of the National Cultural Policy.

8. National Leadership

Leadership of the museum and gallery sector at a national level should be included in the development of a National Cultural Policy.

It is recommended that:

- The creation of an effectively resourced and independent national collections agency in place of the former Collections Council of Australia or a national funding mechanism for the museum and gallery sector be considered as an essential component of the National Cultural Policy.

9. Digitisation

It is recommended that the digitisation of the distributed national collection should be supported by a National Cultural Policy as a means to:

- Open up collections to knowledge that might lie outside current community
- Better engage the wider community in regional and local collections
- Help place regional collections in a wider context
- Increase access to collections regardless of economic, social or geographical limitations

BACKGROUND TO THIS SUBMISSION

Museums & Galleries NSW (M&G NSW) is the leading agency to develop, support and promote regional, community and public museums, galleries and keeping places across NSW.

Established in 1999, M&G NSW is the key agency in NSW for the museum and gallery sector, which comprises more than 600 institutions. M&G NSW receives core and project funding from Arts NSW, Communities NSW and the Australia Council for the Arts. Achievements since 1999 include: over \$800,000 devolved back to the sector, over 160 professional development programs for over 6,000 people, over 40 visual arts, crafts and history touring exhibitions seen by audiences of over 1 million

M&G NSW is committed to facilitating engagement with the broader community through focused programs that improve the museum and gallery sector's role in the community, deepen community participation in cultural heritage and build skills and knowledge in the museum and gallery sector. It has done so by building networks within the museum and gallery sector, being responsive and delivering programs to meet the museum and gallery sector's needs, as well as building significant partnerships with local, state and federal organisations/departments.

Our non-aligned approach allows us to deliver major projects eg touring exhibitions, audience research and information resources for the whole sector and also to advise on the needs of the museum and gallery sector and the community's interest in and engagement with this sector.

M&G NSW recognises there are social and community benefits of participation through volunteering and engaging with cultural and heritage activities. Thus we strongly advocate that support for museums and galleries, especially in rural, regional and socio-economically disadvantaged areas, is continued as a means to make an important contribution to community cohesion and wellbeing.

Finally, our knowledge and awareness of the role and work of this sector has provided convincing evidence that the small to medium museum and gallery sector can enhance and deliver community well-being, creativity and cultural development.

Please refer to a demographic snapshot of the sector in NSW (according to M&G NSW records) in Appendix I.

KEY POLICY INITIATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Our primary recommendation is that consideration of the needs of the small to medium museum and gallery sector be included in the National Cultural Policy.

We believe the following policy initiatives are key to the successful future development of these museums and galleries and their positive role in the community:

1. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IS A KEY CRITERION FOR FUTURE INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE MUSEUM AND GALLERY SECTOR

Effective environmental sustainability plans should be minimal criteria for future funding of regional and local capital infrastructure through federal government initiatives.

Organisations such as Museums & Galleries NSW are well-placed to work with federal agencies to define sustainable economic and environmental criteria.

Funding for research in this area is also important. Innovation in creative industries such as architecture and design should also be stimulated through funding initiatives aimed at providing environmental benefits within a public cultural context.

Recommendation 1:

The National Cultural Policy should address the environmental and economic sustainability of infrastructure.

Support and funding initiatives should be considered that develop a greater awareness of sustainable operations for cultural facilities and a greater understanding of the use of environmentally and economically sustainable practices. This process should commence at the design stage of cultural facilities, and be inclusive of their ongoing operations.

2. CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Cultural activity can play a strong role in community renewal and engagement, and in the regeneration of towns and cities, through the development of cultural precincts.

There is an ongoing need for infrastructure including facilities to support the work of museums and galleries, and the delivery of other cultural activities such as performing arts and libraries.

Local governments who largely develop and manage cultural facilities for their communities, need support in developing these facilities to deliver optimum community benefits.

Federal funding initiatives for cultural facilities need to take into consideration the long term implications of cultural delivery. Operational requirements need to be carefully considered from the outset to ensure sustainability. Adequate long-term operational viability and sustainability should be a criterion of financial support for local initiatives.

New models of cultural facilities should be considered to provide viable solutions for cultural delivery, including cultural hubs and buildings which allow the integration of a multiplicity of art forms. Federal government funding criteria for community infrastructure support and federal

government stimulus initiatives should be informed by a high level understanding of new models for cultural delivery and promote these through funding initiatives, to provide optimum delivery of culture for the community.

Recommendation 2:

The Commonwealth Government continue to support the provision of cultural infrastructure.

Federal funding for cultural infrastructure should be informed by a high level understanding of new community focused models for cultural delivery and a long term assessment of operational viability.

3. AUDIENCE EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT IS KEY TO ENHANCING THE IMPACT AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS OF MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Ongoing support for audience evaluation and development in museums and galleries is vital for developing and building cultural participation.

Museums & Galleries NSW has worked with Australia Council funding over the last 3 years to develop effective profiling of visitors to public galleries in NSW. This research has proven a successful means of both understanding audience composition and advocating to arts funding providers on the value of cultural facilities. The research has identified that there is a very wide cross section of the community who visit and regularly utilise these facilities.

Further funding and support for audience evaluation and development through research and training in small to medium cultural institutions is vital to inform cultural organisations of community needs and the strengths and gaps in current audience participation. It is similarly vital to inform government of the community's engagement with culture.

Small to medium museums and galleries lack both the in-house expertise and resourcing to continue to undertake such research unaided. Federal funding through existing bodies such as the Australia Council for the Arts are necessary to ensure that such research and ensuing development is undertaken.

Recommendation 3:

Ongoing and coordinated support of audience evaluation and development initiatives for small to medium museums and galleries should be maintained as a priority. This will enhance public engagement with cultural and heritage activities. Simultaneously the increase in awareness of audience requirements within cultural organisations will ensure greater benefits for the community.

4. ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY SHOULD INCLUDE CONSIDERATION OF RELEVANT AND APPROPRIATE CONNECTIONS WITH MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Continued encouragement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community participation in and involvement with museums and galleries is a vital component to the future veracity and integrity of these organisations, as places that reflect the broad and diverse identity and culture of Australia.

It is also important that the identification, interpretation and exhibition of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material in museums and galleries is properly connected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities and their right to cultural expression and identity. Strategies for the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material in museums should continue to be developed in collaboration with relevant communities.

Recommendation 4:

That strategies embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture incorporate:

- Proper consideration of the importance of material that is held in museums and galleries
- The connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their heritage and materials currently held in museums and galleries
- The role that museums and galleries can play in supporting engagement

5. VOLUNTEER RUN-MUSEUMS DELIVER AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY THROUGH THEIR CARE OF COLLECTIONS AND ADDITIONALLY SUPPORT COMMUNITY WELL-BEING, BEYOND THEIR ROLE AS MUSEUMS

Museums in the community, run by volunteer groups, are an essential and vital component in the delivery of cultural heritage experiences, particularly in regional areas.

While ideally, more paid positions in such museums would ensure greater sustainability of these organisations, museums provide a valuable opportunity for community volunteers to participate in the preservation and interpretation of their community's history and identity. Volunteer run museums offer volunteers the opportunity to develop new skills, increase their connections to the community and support a healthy and engaged lifestyle.

Support for volunteer-managed museums is essential to maintaining the fabric of our cultural heritage and for providing support for a healthy community. This can be in the form of training, skills development and resources for volunteer initiatives; capacity building through volunteer participation in standards programs, such as the national standards program run by M&G NSW and other organizations across Australia and resources to support and encourage volunteer efforts through regional Australia.

Recommendation 5:

Support for volunteer museums should be incorporated into a National Cultural Policy, as these museums care for collections essential to informing Australia's heritage and identity. Involvement in the volunteer museum movement also creates the opportunity for individuals to participate in the community, undertake life-long learning and enhance healthy community lifestyles.

6. THE CARE OF THE DISTRIBUTED NATIONAL COLLECTION IN SMALL TO MEDIUM MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES SHOULD BE RECOGNISED IN THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

The myriad of museums and galleries throughout the nation form a vital link in sustaining cultural identity.

While major state and federal cultural institutions house significant collections, there are equally significant items, in terms of Australian culture, identity and history, to be found in the distributed national collection across Australia. Items of rare significance and immense value to the nation or to the region can be well cared for in a local public collection, or can be hidden in the bowels of a poorly resourced community museum.

The approach to wholesale management of this collection has been ad hoc. While resources such as the National Standards for Australian Museum and Galleries provide the means to identify and care for significant items, the uptake is slow and resources to support it meagre. Initiatives such as grants through the community heritage program managed by the National Library, are valued, but barely touch the surface of need.

A national program to identify and to manage collections is required, commencing with a national audit of significant items and ongoing support for a structured program of support for the maintenance and preservation of the distributed national collection.

There are a number of existing organisations (such as M&G NSW) and mechanisms in place that are capable of delivering this objective. It is not proposed that an additional organisation be created to oversee this.

For this to be effective, this can only be achieved through a funding level and structure comparative to the Australia Council for the Arts.

Recommendation 6:

A National Cultural Policy should embrace the relevance and care of aspects of the distributed national collection housed in community and small to medium public museums and galleries. The policy commitment to support this collection should also provide the strategy and means for its identification, documentation and preservation.

7. TOURISM INITIATIVES SHOULD BE LINKED TO THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

Regional museums and galleries are valuable focal points for tourism. They form an essential, but often unacknowledged role in defining a community's identity and offering visitors authentic insight into a locality or region. As many of these organisations are volunteer run or not for profit organisations, operating on slim budgets, museums and galleries are not always well placed to deliver optimum experiences for the visitor or to fund the promotion of relevant services to potential visitors.

Funding and support for development and promotion are vital to ensure that this sector able to effectively fulfil its significant tourism role. The incorporation of cultural tourism standards and integrated marketing strategies would assist visitors to connect with the cultural and heritage offerings of a region.

Recommendation 7:

The inclusion of a tourism strategy for significant support of regional economic development through the museum and gallery sector should be considered in the development of the National Cultural Policy.

8. LEADERSHIP OF THE MUSEUM AND GALLERY SECTOR AT A NATIONAL LEVEL SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

The demise of the Collections Council of Australia will leave Australia devoid of opportunities for national coordination and independent advice to government for the museum, gallery and overall collections sector.

While the federal government currently supports national cultural institutions and national initiatives such as Visions of Australia, the Community Heritage Grants scheme and the Collections Australia Network, the sector requires broader strategic support at a federal level. This is particularly important for small to medium organisations which would benefit from access to information such as:

- The impact of the newly developed national curriculum, in particular the national history curriculum
- Follow-on from the CCA's work on digitisation of collections
- Effective models and information on participation and support of the creative industries
- Effective models and assistance in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections and communities
- Opportunities to further support the health and sustainability of Australia's Distributed National Collection and its effective engagement with the community.

There are several international models for leadership of the collections sector and it is recommended that consideration be given to providing national leadership for the sector, particularly the small to medium museum and gallery sector, in order to sustain and support this sector.

Recommendation 8:

To consider the creation of an effectively resourced and independent national collections agency in place of the former Collections Council of Australia or a national funding mechanism for the museum and gallery sector as an essential component of the National Cultural Policy.

9. DIGITISATION

The digitisation of community collections should be supported by a National Cultural Policy as a means to:

- Open up collections to knowledge that might lie outside the current community
- Better engage the wider community in regional and local collections
- Help place regional collections in a wider context
- Increase access to collections regardless of economic, social or geographical limitations

Appendix I

Sizing-up the sector

ABS information indicates that **over 31%** of museums and galleries in Australia are located in NSW.

According to data collected by M&G NSW in 2008, our records indicate that there are:

- **621 museums and galleries in NSW**, broken down as follows:
 - **35** state or federally funded cultural institutions
 - **37 regional galleries** managed by local government
 - **38 museums** managed by local government
 - **24 professionally-staffed galleries** including University-funded galleries
 - **59 professionally-staffed museums** including those managed by Trusts, universities and community groups
 - **59 community galleries and artist run initiatives**
 - **349 volunteer community museums**
 - **20 Aboriginal keeping places and cultural centres**

- Approximately **34%** of all these are located in **greater metropolitan Sydney**, with **30%** in **coastal regional areas** and **36%** in **non-coastal regional areas** of the state.
- Visitor numbers to museums and galleries in NSW are estimated at **7-7.5 million per year**.
- An average of **1.5 – 2 million people visit museums and galleries** outside the CBD per year. These organisations are managed by **3-400 staff** and **3,500 – 4,000 volunteers** and house more than **8.5 million collection items**.