

12 March 2019

The Hon Don Harwin, MLC
NSW Minister for the Arts
Via Ministerial website

Dear Mr Harwin

I am writing to you as the National Director of the Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) which is the national membership association and peak advocacy body representing Australia's galaxy of national, state, regional and local museums, galleries and other collecting and exhibiting institutions. Our NSW Branch is an active and highly committed network, and many NSW museums – such as the MCA and the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney, and the regional art galleries of Maitland and Lake Macquarie – won national awards for the museum and gallery sector in 2018. The state's flagship institutions are all invaluable and much-loved parts of the nation's cultural life as well as for their local communities.

I wish to comment on and strengthen your cultural policy agendas for the forthcoming state election through making the following brief observations.

Most importantly, I ask that you consider expanding your commitment to the museum and gallery sector that will better enable these institutions to serve both their local communities and the state.

1. The value of arts, culture, creativity and heritage

Current research is revealing the deep value of arts, culture and heritage to society and the economy in increasing numbers of ways, including business innovation, tourism generation and health and wellbeing.

For NSW in particular, the importance and economic benefits of the creative industries are profound.

The collections sector (galleries, museums, libraries and archives) is both a resource for innovation and creativity, and a basis for learning and knowledge production on many levels.

A local community actively engaged in arts and culture through this sector, are active participants in improving quality of life, creativity and improved education outcomes.

Furthermore, a vibrant artistic and cultural community is a key drawcard for cultural and business tourism visitors to this state. In 2018, Create NSW provided data that show the significance of culture, heritage, arts events and festivals to tourism experience and numbers, to increasing employment and businesses, and to strengthening communities.

In summary: the cultural sector is the parallel source of knowledge to the formal education system and museums and galleries, as core parts of this sector, are hugely trusted sources of information, learning and engagement for people of all

ages. Furthermore, they help foster the creative industries which are one of the engine houses of the economy. (Darren Henley, *The Arts Dividend: Why investment in culture pays*, 2016)

While your commitment to the regions through the Regional Cultural Fund is welcome, there is demonstrable need and the opportunity to:

- invest in capacity building for regional and local museums and galleries, *and in particular for the volunteer-run organisations that struggle to protect and present so much of the state's heritage*, through providing significantly more funds and support for community outreach and museum advisory services to the regions,
- invest in new and upgraded infrastructure and innovative program funding for the regions' cultural institutions and the communities they serve,
- foster the increasing focus on Indigenous cultures, and reconciliation through participation in the state's museums and galleries, by actively supporting NSW's role in implementing the national *Indigenous 10-year Roadmap for Change*, and
- co-develop and support with the state's tourism bodies an investment and marketing program for regional museums and galleries.

More detail on our advice for the regions can be found in our submission to the Portfolio Committee No. 4 Inquiry into Museums and Galleries in New South Wales.

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/56084/0042%20Museums%20Galleries%20Australia.pdf>

2. Strategic state investments

As with other policy making (for example in industry or social policy) a state cultural policy both demonstrates the public value of culture and provides a structure for strategic investment and impact. An agreed framework enables better decision-making and effective action at all levels.

We support your commitment to capital works improvements at the Australian Museum and the Art Gallery of NSW, and urge you to explore policy opportunities and make deeper strategic state investments in:

- digital access to the full range of collections large and small,
- increased and sufficient resources for staff and programs – the software if you like – alongside the significant capital works planned for the state's museums and galleries – the infrastructural hardware,
- removal of the Efficiency Dividend which is a compounding budget cut that falls damagingly and disproportionately upon state cultural institutions,
- improving and increasing collections storage facilities and supporting infrastructure, and
- supporting efforts to disaster proof our arts and heritage institutions and communities.

The contentious matter of the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum from Ultimo to Parramatta would also be better addressed through a coherent policy framework for the state. There is a substantial number of museum professionals who believe that the relocation process has been flawed. Museum planning standards have not been met in a number of ways. At core, museums and collections are an inter-generational responsibility. A fundamental principle is that collections must be protected.

In summary, states and cities must continue to evolve and improve their cultural offerings and we would welcome a state cultural policy that includes well-argued proposals for change and for funding and support programs that would enlarge the cultural infrastructure throughout both Sydney and the regions.

Australia's peak bodies in the galleries, libraries, archives and museums sector (GLAM Peak), have joined together to promote recognition of digitisation and connectivity for the arts and culture as a key need for the nation. Each state is being asked to develop a state-wide Digital Access Plan through a collaborative approach backed by all government cultural institutions. We support your recent work in this area and urge ongoing resourcing of a state implementation plan for digital discoverability and access to collections that links with the national framework and standards.

In summary, digital access is key to unlocking much of the potential of the state's collections to enrich New South Wales' society and economy, and the development and implementation of a state-wide Digital Access Plan needs long-term commitment and targeted funding.

It is important to emphasize that digitisation of objects and artworks does not reduce the importance of "the real thing" and therefore, the need for upgrading conservation and storage facilities.

Finally, the growing rate of climate and disaster-induced destruction of irreplaceable cultural collections, particularly in regional Australia, is increasingly recognised and local organisations need advice and support to both reduce the risk and mitigate the consequences.

In summary: disaster-preparedness and developing resilience in organisations is a critical and under-resourced need. Will you support investment in disaster-preparedness planning for cultural institutions?

I am very happy to provide further information or discuss policy opportunities.

Yours sincerely



Alexandra Marsden
National Director