

**PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
JSC ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES**

8 MAY 2018

CANBERRA'S NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

SUBMISSION CONCLUSIONS

Museums Galleries Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to this Inquiry. The submission on the following pages addresses strategies 1-5 in the Terms of Reference.

The key conclusions are:

- **The national cultural institutions in Canberra play a vital role for Australia and are delivering in the main on core national responsibilities to high standards, despite deep funding cuts over many years.**
 - 5.7 million people visited them on-site in 2016/17
 - In 2016, over 70% of ACT residents felt the arts have a 'big' or 'very big' impact on: their understanding of other people and cultures; stimulating their minds; their ability to express themselves; their ability to think creatively and develop new ideas; and on child development; with 66% responding that the arts positively affect their sense of wellbeing and happiness. (Australia Council National Participation Survey Report 2017)
- **However, the current story is one of significant unrealised potential.**
 - Reduced operating budgets over the last decade have led to an erosion of staff – the core providers of knowledge, expertise and program delivery
 - Regional Australians are missing out through, for example, reduced numbers of touring exhibitions from some institutions
 - The National Gallery of Australia closed its offsite NGA Contemporary Gallery in 2016 and reduced FTE staff positions by almost 33% between 2011-12 and 2015-16
 - The capacity for innovation, experimentation, responsiveness and flexibility is severely hindered by the twin constraints of the ASL cap and the compounding effects of the efficiency dividend
 - The institutions have significantly increased their levels of private sector support and income streams other than government funds, however these sources do not and should not replace an adequate level of public resourcing

- The lack of a national cultural policy framework, or integrated master-planning for the institutions within their Canberra locations, increases uncertainty and ad hoc solutions
 - Museums and galleries are an intergenerational commitment and require significant additional investment now and steady long-term support
- **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.**
 - 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
 - For the ACT, the importance and economic benefits of the cultural institutions and creative industries are profound. For example, Canberra’s recent tourism boom, when almost 3 million tourists visited the city in 2017, was driven significantly by the attractions of the iconic national institutions
- **The Commonwealth needs to develop a more coherent and long-term policy framework for arts, culture and heritage that includes greater levels of support for the national cultural institutions.**
 - The framework should draw on the increasing understanding of the value of the cultural sector to Australian society and the economy
 - It should, amongst other measures, provide higher levels of budget appropriations to the national museums and galleries to ensure maximum impact and sustainability, including the permanent removal of the grossly inefficient “efficiency dividend”
 - The Efficiency Dividend has been proven to be particularly damaging to smaller organisations such as the cultural institutions
 - It should include a comprehensive plan for digital access to collections that links with and contributes to the emerging national framework and standards, and to the National Research Infrastructure Plan
 - A policy framework will enable essential master planning for the sustainable development of the institutions and the cultural economy of Canberra, and
 - It will enable the institutions to better fulfil their national and international roles.

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Museums Galleries Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the topics and strategies in the Terms of Reference for the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions.

We also support the advice in the submissions prepared by the Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD), the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and GLAM Peak.

Before addressing specific topics in the Terms of Reference, we will outline who we are and what we do, and stress the importance of the cultural sector to Australia and the ways in which it contributes to social and economic wellbeing.

Who we are

Museums Galleries Australia is the national membership association and peak advocacy body representing museums and galleries. We encompass a wide and diverse range of national, state, regional and community museums, art galleries, historic sites, botanic and zoological gardens, research centres, Indigenous cultural centres, and Keeping Places across Australia.

All of our members are, however, linked by a shared dedication to culture and the communities they serve. They understand that Australian cultural life is a dynamic ecosystem that generates creativity and innovation and contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of the country. Attachment A provides a short profile of the organisation and a snapshot of the diverse range of member institutions.

MGA is an advocacy, research, service and professional development organisation. We seek to enhance the value of Australia's collections, public programs and stories by sharing knowledge, developing skills, inspiring innovation and providing leadership and the authoritative voice in protecting and promoting our arts, science and cultural heritage.

We build on a history of museum professional association activity that extends back to the 1930s, have branches in every state and territory, and support professional national networks of expertise. This submission draws both on the lived experience of our galleries and museums, and state, national and international research, expertise and standards.

The cultural sector

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 fundamental sources of

information, learning and engagement for people of all ages. These institutions encourage curiosity, creativity and critical thinking, offer rich aesthetic and emotional experiences through art, science, history and story-telling, and enable people to access objects and collections in ways that enrich lives and society. 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)

Vital statistics

- 98% of Australians engage with the arts. (Australia Council National Participation Survey Report 2017)
- In 2016-17 over 10 million people visited the national collecting institutions (on + off site)
- Over 50,000 Australians volunteer in museums and galleries

Definition

We define “museum” as an organisation with the following characteristics:
A museum helps people understand the world by using objects and ideas to interpret the past and present and explore the future. A museum preserves and researches collections, and makes objects and information accessible in actual and virtual environments. Museums are established in the public interest as permanent, not-for-profit organisations that contribute long term value to communities.

We recognise that museums of science, history and art may be designated by many other names (including gallery and Keeping Place). In addition, the following may qualify as museums for the purposes of this definition:

- (a) natural, archaeological and ethnographic monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of a museum nature that acquire, conserve and communicate material evidence of people and their environment;
- (b) organisations holding collections of and displaying live specimens of plants and animals, such as botanical and zoological gardens, aquaria and vivaria;
- (c) science centres;
- (d) cultural centres and other entities that facilitate the preservation, continuation and management of tangible or intangible heritage resources (living heritage and digital creative activity);
- (e) such other organisation as the Council considers as having some or all of the characteristics of a museum.

Museums and galleries are hugely trusted institutions in civil society. Research by the American Alliance of Museums (Washington) finds that:

Museums are considered the most trustworthy source of information in America, rated higher than local papers, non-profits researchers, the U.S. government, or academic researchers.

In Australia, research carried out by independent market research company IPSOS for the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, Canberra, reveals that museums are very high on the list of institutions that are trusted by Australians.

The Canberra-based cultural institutions are holders of outstanding national collections and knowledge, play complementary roles across the range of institutional types, and are leading practitioners and thought-leaders in their fields. As Canberra has grown, so

have they - to be highly successful and visible national icons, contributing to understandings of national identity, to Indigenous reconciliation, and to scholarship across the globe. They have been recognised in national awards and have regularly increased visitation, both through physical attendance and online participation. (see the 2016-17 Annual Reports for: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Australian War Memorial, Museum of Australian Democracy, National Archives of Australia, National Film and Sound Archive, National Gallery of Australia, National Library of Australia, National Museum of Australia, National Portrait Gallery, and Questacon.)

Challenges

We live in a rapidly changing environment: a world of immense social, environmental, economic and technological change. This is especially pertinent for our galleries and museums and how they serve their communities and the nation. The CSIRO's Global Foresight Project identifies six 'Mega trends', two of which are significant in this context:

- Great Expectations: expanding consumer and societal expectations for services, experiences and social interaction; and
- Virtually Here: increased connectivity, impacting shops, offices, cities, governance models and lifestyles.

In the spheres of health and education, extensive research shows that "long term arts engagement supports positive health outcomes", and "arts in education ... contributes in important ways to the factors that underpin learning, such as cognitive abilities, confidence, motivation, problem-solving and communication skills", (*Crossick & Kaszynska, Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture, AHRC, UK 2016*)

Canberra's national institutions operate within an ecosystem of interconnections nation-wide as well as globally. Decisions about priorities and activities have an impact across these webs of relationships. The diminished level of support for the national institutions over the last decade, combined with a generally piecemeal and under-funded approach in most states and territories to their own cultural institutions and activities, means that the Australian cultural sector is struggling to meet challenges, collaborate, thrive, and reach its full potential.

Terms of Reference

The Inquiry is seeking information on the range of innovative strategies that Canberra's national institutions are using to maintain viability and relevance to sustainably grow their profile, visitor numbers, and revenue. Strategies 1-3 focus on engagement with a strong lens on digital, strategies 4 and 5 focus on resourcing, strategy 6 on governance and an additional matter highlighted by the committee is the process for establishing new institutions.

Strategy 1. Creating a strong brand and online presence, and

Strategy 2. Experimenting with new forms of public engagement and audience participation and online presence

A range of museum and gallery-led audience research is revealing changing contexts, behaviours and expectations. Better access and engagement is increasingly regarded

as core business by all cultural institutions. This encompasses physical and online access (as well as intellectual – that is a range of public programs for people of differing levels of ability, age and engagement).

Significantly, social media and new technology are also changing the dynamics of power: changing the way people interact with each other, within communities, with the media and institutions, including with museums and governments. Rising expectations both challenge organisations and create opportunities for doing things differently and better. User-testing has moved from the realm of designing industrial products to designing policies and programs that place citizens and communities at the centre of the whole process.

In museums and galleries, this means stepping back from the voice of authority and using more collaborative methods, such as prototyping approaches, and exhibitions co-developed with the citizens/users/visitors' backgrounds engaged from the start. Such approaches aim to ensure that various communities' experiences, ideas and feedback can be sought to inform each stage of development. This means seeking to understand different views and needs, developing empathy and, most challenging of all, sharing power.

The national cultural institutions in Canberra are strong leaders in this arena – see for example the community-driven *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters* exhibition at the National Museum of Australia, described as a “breathtaking triumph of 21st century museology” (Paul Daley, *The Guardian* 16 September 2017); and the Museum of Australian Democracy's *The “Power of Us”: How Australians imagine their democracy*.

These institutions have also long recognised the actuality and potential of digital transformation and there are numerous examples of the powerful ways in which they are harnessing, exploring and adapting digital technologies and encouraging digital literacy.

The National Portrait Gallery has an award-winning application for school visitors using iPads, and has largely digitised its collection. Questacon is collaborating with CSIRO's Data 61 on gamification of research in biodiversity and Australian stories.

On-line access to collections has been growing steadily over the last decade, as an integral part of each institution's mandate for accessibility. The acquisition and management of digital collections and enabling digital access have become very much part of the mainstream activities of the institutions rather than separate streams. Digital approaches are also impacting the ways in which exhibitions are researched, developed and communicated.

New technologies such as Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality are also used to achieve heightened emotional responses in museums around the world and in the national institutions. See for example, the Dome Lab - “*Travelling Kungkarangkalpa*” - a digital sanctuary in the National Museum of Australia's *Songlines* exhibition <http://www.niea.unsw.edu.au/research/projects/domelab>

These digital technologies enable full immersion, show objects at scale, and place them in context. Meanwhile opportunities to connect audiences through technology such as Twitter and live-streaming spawn such programs as the Museum of Australian Democracy's twitter account following Gough Whitlam's Dismissal, on the 40th anniversary of that event.

More information can be found in “Live social media as museum object”, “Using Augmented Reality in Galleries and Museums”, and “Significantly Digital” - three articles in the Museums Galleries Australia Magazine Vol. 25(2) 2017

<https://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/museums-galleries-australia-magazine>

As a sector, it is not simply collections access that is facilitated by digital. The role of galleries and museums in the visitor economy is predicated on giving visitors and tourists timely appropriate information and responsive service, which increasingly means through provision and engagement with sophisticated digital tools across multiple agencies (such as media, transport infrastructure, and tourism marketing).

Regardless of specific digital skills in collections management, research and learning, the role of cultural organisations in education is predicated on keeping up with the technologies regarded as ‘normal’ by emerging cohorts of students. Today’s schoolchildren regard access to images, video and reliable information as the default. During visits to museums and galleries, the ability to interact digitally is essential for effective engagement and learning. In turn, these organisations help enable students, whatever their experience or access to opportunities elsewhere, to catch up and participate in the digital economy.

Strategy 3. Conducting outreach outside of Canberra

Providing digital access is the most effective way of ensuring Australian arts, scientific collections, and heritage, in all its many forms, can be discovered and enjoyed by audiences in Australia (both in cities and in the regions and remote areas) and worldwide. There are many stories about the positive impact digital access has had on the lives of individuals and there are a number of examples of how digital access has led to important scientific and policy outcomes.

Questacon has taken a leading role in boosting the teaching of STEM in schools across Australia. The Smart Skills Initiative has delivered hands-on, inquiry based workshops to 54,183 teachers and students across Australia, including 23,000 on line. In addition, between 2011 and 2015, the Schmidt Studio at Questacon delivered project- based virtual excursions and videoconferencing to 13,500 students from 387 schools.

However, the cost of maintaining a vital online presence does not come cheap, and it needs more regular major renewals than, for example, permanent exhibition fit-outs.

Canberra’s national institutions also play a strong role in Australia’s cultural diplomacy, through welcoming large numbers of international visitors and dignitaries, curating international exhibitions, loans and exchanges, and participating in or chairing international boards and collaborations, such as the Australia-Singapore Arts Group.

For the national institutions, touring exhibitions around Australia is an equally vital activity to enable them to meet their national responsibilities. For the National Gallery of Australia, the touring exhibition is inviolate, with six or seven exhibitions touring nationally at any one time. They send many to regional areas, rather than solely focusing on the big cities, believing that impact and success is not an attendance numbers game.

However, some institutions have reluctantly curtailed their touring exhibition programs, due to diminishing operational funding. The National Portrait Gallery works hard to have three to four touring exhibitions on the road at any one time, and is unable to satisfy the demand from regional galleries for more. Their resourcing has been reduced to such an extent that it is harming their capacity to deliver core programs, far less fulfil their national remit.

Feedback from the cultural sector in the states and territories is that the diminished resources of the national institutions limits their capacity to provide truly national reach, visibility and access.

Strategies 4 & 5. Cultivating private sector support; and developing other income streams

The national institutions have developed considerable entrepreneurial skills and secured significant philanthropic support, business partnerships and collaborative research funding. They have active fundraising programs, however this support is generally specific to a particular acquisition, activity, program or one-off capital project. The support rarely contributes to operational funding. The challenge is not only finding other ways to replace funding that had previously been provided by government, but to reduce underlying costs.

The nature of sponsorship and business partnerships is also changing. There is less cash on the table and more in-kind propositions. The small size of Canberra means that large corporations are looking very carefully at whether to put money into physical exhibitions and activities. The support of the ACT government for major events is therefore very well placed.

Diversifying income cannot replace an adequate level of operational funding.

The Efficiency Dividend (or annual funding reduction in real terms) has been in place at the Commonwealth level for over 30 years, with rates varying between 1% and 4%. Cultural organisations like galleries, museums, libraries and archives, are distinctively different from large government departments. They are small, seven days per week operations servicing the public, with high fixed costs, and resource reductions have a significant impact. The compounding cuts have resulted in the loss of knowledge as staff numbers are reduced, along with services and activities. Skills disappear and long-term strategic planning is harder. Up front expenditure on reform or innovation is also difficult to secure. Questacon has closed programs focusing on the regions, notes the drag effect on the organisation's productivity and is concerned about the long-term consequences.

The cumulative impact has been significant. When this is combined with the inflexible application of the ASL cap, the organisations are hindered in securing donations and responding flexibly to changing patterns of visitation or program delivery.

The role of private funding sector support and other funding streams has to be examined but within the context of public funding provision: frameworks, priorities, secure resourcing and flexible management. It appears that the current policy framework and the associated government resourcing, strategic planning and support is inadequate.

There is a need for a more coherent and long-term policy framework that guides and prioritises both capital and capability investment in the national institutions. An injection of targeted funding for long term strategic planning for sustainability is now required.

On the positive side, planning for new generation National Collaborative Research Infrastructure includes the development and funding of collaborative Platforms for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, which would access digitised historical and art collections in galleries and museums. National investment in this area could emulate the success of the Atlas of Living Australia, which has been a game changer for access, discoverability and use of biological collections held by museums.

Other Relevant Matter. The process for establishing new institutions

The national government has a leadership role in cultural, arts and heritage policies, programs and investment frameworks, which should also be recognised as part of Australia's investment, innovation and growth agenda.

The national institutions play a key role in delivering on a growth and impact agenda for the 21st century.

The process for establishing new institutions should be part of a coherent national policy framework which would enable essential master planning for the sustainable development of current and future institutions and the cultural economy of Canberra.

Conclusions

- **The national cultural institutions in Canberra play a vital role for Australia and are delivering in the main on core national responsibilities to high standards, despite deep funding cuts over many years.**
- **However, the current story is one of significant unrealised potential.**
- **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, educational attainment, and health and wellbeing.**
- **The Commonwealth needs to develop a more coherent and long-term policy framework for arts, culture and heritage that includes greater levels of support for the national cultural institutions.**