



**Supporting the right conditions
for Australian museums and galleries**

**A submission by Museums Australia (NSW)
on a national cultural policy**

21 October 2011

We agree to your submission being made publicly available on the
www.culture.arts.gov.au website

Contact: Paul Bentley, Executive Officer
Email: pbentley@idx.com.au
Museums Australia (NSW)
PO Box 2421 Bondi Junction NSW 1355
Phone 9237 7307 Mobile 0416 121 347
Web: www.museumsaustralia.org.au/nsw

\\mansw\...\artsfederal\culturalpolicy2011\manswsubmission

OUTLINE

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Who we are

1.2 Our understanding of the national cultural policy intentions

2. OUR SUGGESTIONS

2.1 Support dedicated strategies to each sector covered by the NCP

2.2 Provide cross-sectoral coordinating mechanisms and incentives

2.3 Assist in transforming the use of technology

2.4 Provide programs to strengthen the volunteer workforce

2.5 Facilitate connections between museums and schools

3. SOURCES

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Who we are

The Museums Australia NSW Branch (MANSW) makes this submission to highlight the needs of museums and galleries as part of a national cultural policy.

MANSW is a division of Australia's national professional association for museum and gallery sector. It represents the interests of approximately 600 museums and galleries in New South Wales and 10,000 employees, including 8000 volunteers. Many of the museums are run by volunteers. The branch has a network of 10 regional chapters across the state.

1.2 Our understanding of the national cultural policy scope

The Australian Government is seeking views on the future direction of the arts and culture sector in meeting the following goals

- **Goal 1:** To ensure that what the Government supports — and how this support is provided — reflects the diversity of a 21st century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture
- **Goal 2:** To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture
- **Goal 3:** To support excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas
- **Goal 4:** To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy

As indicated in the Government's discussion paper, the National Cultural Policy sets out to provide a comprehensive framework to connect national policies and priorities in the following areas:

- **Core arts**, including music, the performing arts, literature and visual arts and the means by which these arts are made available through institutions such as galleries, libraries, theatres, cultural venues, training institutions, broadcasters and online channels.
- **Creative industries**, including film and television production, broadcasting, electronic games, architecture, design and fashion, publishing, media and advertising enterprises.
- **Cultural heritage**, recognising Australia's Indigenous culture and other 'cultural heritage' considerations such as libraries archives, museums, galleries, historical societies and kindred enterprises.

2 OUR SUGGESTIONS

MANSW supports the development of a national cultural policy.

In doing so, we note the observations of Professor David Throsby that an effective cultural policy is unlikely to be “a single document or statement or piece of legislation...[it is more likely to be] a collection of actions that governments take to create the conditions under which our cultural values, and indeed our whole cultural life can find their expression.”¹

We note parallel reviews and initiatives that are underway, as identified in the NCP discussion paper. In preparing our submission, we have also drawn on additional government policies and reports on the cultural sector, and the information and digital economies, from the time of the Mcleay Report in 1986 onwards.

In general, these have emphasised strategies in relation to content, collaboration, connectivity and capability.² We anticipate these concepts will feature prominently in the national cultural policy.

In this submission, we focus on issues relevant to the museums and galleries sector. In making them, we draw on our recent submission to Arts NSW to assist the NSW Government’s work in developing a new strategy for the visual arts and museum sectors in NSW, particularly in relation to regional and community museums. The submission to Arts NSW is available in two parts at <http://museumsaustralia.org.au/site/nswdocs.php>.³

We encourage the Australian Government to act in five areas to support the right conditions for museums, galleries and kindred enterprises.

2.1 Support dedicated strategies to each sector covered by the NCP

Each of the sectors identified in the discussion paper needs dedicated strategies.

There are unifying connections between the arts, creative industries and cultural heritage. But, as Throsby suggests, effective policy calls for a suite of differentiated policies rather than an amorphous cultural policy characterised by meaningless generalisations and confusing language.

The concept *creative industries* is in some ways a flawed concept because many other industries are just as creative and the industries that make up the so-called creative industries sector need different kinds and levels of support.

The phrase *cultural heritage* also muddies the waters in relation to appropriate strategies and funding programs. Governments have traditionally funded museums, galleries, libraries and archives through arts portfolios. *Cultural heritage* has been a convenient way of encapsulating policies for collecting institutions. However, categorising museums, archives and libraries as ‘cultural heritage’ agents distorts their overall purpose and value. While cultural heritage is an important aspect of their function, their converging roles in providing access to information, producing

cultural content and experiences and contributing to educational, social, scientific, technological and economic agendas are equally important.

2.2 Provide cross-sectoral coordinating incentives

Future programs will depend on the collaborative efforts of government bodies and agencies, major museums, regional museums, regional museum development officers and bodies such as Museums Australia (NSW) to manage national, state and local strategies.

Government leadership is needed. The fractured nature of the sector makes it difficult, even with the best will in the world, for individual institutions to exercise cross-sectoral leadership. As Diane Zorich, Günter Waibel and Ricky Erway, in their OCLC report, *Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration Among Libraries, Archives and Museums*, observe: "While many independent LAMs can easily articulate a broad and compelling vision of network-level access to their resources, by definition they generally lack the unifying influence of a mandate that would propel the LAM community toward that vision ... Governments and other entities can have a significant impact in realising a more collaborative environment through strategic investment."

Cross-sectoral coordinating mechanisms and incentives are needed. The Australian Government recently closed the Cultural Ministers Council and the Collections Council of Australia. It stopped funding for the Collections Australia Network. Reports from the reviews of the CCA and CAN have not been made available. The Government has not explained the reasons for the closure and what they have in mind as future coordinating mechanisms. The National Cultural Policy provides an opportunity to address this confusion and tackle the funding quagmire.

One notable example of government support of museums, libraries and kindred enterprises is the Institute of Museums and Library Services (IMLS) in the United States.

Funding programs need to be well coordinated in federal, state and local government jurisdictions. The 2008 IMLS study, *Exhibiting Public Value: Government Funding for Museums in the United States*, raised a number of issues that are relevant to the situation in Australia: the diversity of museums in terms of disciplines, attendances, resource needs, and geographic reach; the inconsistent pattern of public support across the museum sector; the difficulty of tracking and analysing data because of differences in the way the sector codifies museum grants; the lack of a federal-state partnership program with the goal of increasing the capacity to the museum sector as a whole; the flow of Government support through a variety of different agencies and funding mechanisms; different perceptions about museums and different fiscal conditions in jurisdictions; uncertainties on the best way of coordinating future options.

Solutions for determining the level of funding for regional and community museums and galleries, the type of funding and the justification for funds at a state level may be found in the approach for subsidising local government libraries in NSW and the

development of indicators about cultural heritage value, social and economic impact, as outlined in part 2 of our submission to Arts NSW.

2.3 Assist in transforming the use of technology

Technology is widely regarded as the primary driver of change in societies, economies, industries and organisations. Australian Governments have given emphasis to technological imperatives since 1994, when *Creative Nation* was published. The latest *National Digital Economy Plan* flags future opportunities.

Technological solutions in museums often address a range of other issues such as questions of significance, conservation, and rights.

The converging interests of museums and kindred organisations are not well coordinated in Australia. Museums are still at an experimental stage of dealing with networked information. They have tended to operate in the past as standalone corner shops rather than chain stores.

Three voices are beacons for future strategies.

- **The Semantic Web needs better metadata.** As industries develop systems with the aim of placing data in a future Semantic Web, Open Calais' Tom Tague has said that the Semantic Web – as it exists today - is a mess and it needs librarians and their ilk to help clean it up. In other words, the bigger the haystack becomes the harder it will be to find the needles unless the needles are made easy to find.
- **This can be done by using information engineering principles.** David Bearman and Jennifer Trant have written that museums and libraries need to develop methods for constructing knowledge models that “are sufficiently forgiving to permit useful aggregation of content, structured by a number of disciplines, yet sufficiently architecturally sound to enable useful computing across resource domains...In a networked environment, the value of these knowledge models will be determined more by their ability to connect to other knowledge representations by other groups, than by their ability to represent all subtle aspects of terms used for indexing aspects of cultural heritage...The basic principles of information engineering must be respected from the outset in the construction of cultural information utilities...The promise of the web is to virtually unite and re-unite digital objects in contextual information spaces.”
- **Incentives are needed to encourage integrated and differentiated approaches.** Professor Christine Borgman has emphasised the need for both integration and differentiation. Search engines don't do everything and they don't do enough: the world needs both generic and specialised searching. We need to think about the economic conditions and the huge duplication of effort of the information grazing land. We need to match policy with incentives.

See the end of our submission for further sources on these points.⁴

MANSW is currently working on a proposal for a survey of ICT and digitisation in regional and community museums in New South Wales as a foundation for the development of future strategies in the state. We will finalise the proposal to take into account the strategy for museums by the NSW Government, when published, and recent international and local reports developments. Some of the issues and challenges at an institutional level – and on a wider front - are synthesised in a recent OCLC report, *Single Search: The Quest for the Holy Grail*.⁵ We will be seeking funds to support the survey and, eventually, to collaborate with other national, NSW and interstate players on future steps.

2.4 Provide programs to strengthen the volunteer workforce

MANSW supports the continuation of substantial funding to major national, state and regional cultural institutions.

We also encourage support for the large number of volunteer-run museums and volunteers working in museums.

Museums and historical societies have played an important role for more than a century in preserving Australia's heritage and history. Their dedication has saved from destruction numerous historical buildings in the NSW cities and towns. This foresight has led to social and economic benefits to the communities they serve. The buildings and landmarks they helped to save are now essential parts of tourist experiences. Individual stories, when assembled, tell us a lot about our collective past and the things that influence our collective future. Local stories have become globally significant.

Regional and community museums and historical societies need the support of governments and businesses. Appropriate investment in programs for volunteers and the employment of key staff to manage and coordinate volunteer staff would assist in capitalising on the valuable role of volunteers as protectors of our cultural heritage. Future funding solutions could also involve incentives for museums and kindred organisations to connect with other cultural, educational, business enterprises and social services within local communities, as highlighted by Andrew Mawson in his *The Social Entrepreneur: Making Communities Work*.

2.5 Facilitate connections between museums and schools

Museums and galleries have enormous potential as educators. This is underscored in a number of reputable international reports including the MLA study *Research on the Impact of Museums in Education: Inspiring Learning, Building Communities: What Did You Learn at the Museum Today?* and the Institute of Museum and Library Services' *Charting the Landscape, Mapping New Paths: Museums, Libraries, and K-12 Learning*.

Governments and museums internationally have been responding to this need for more than a decade as exemplified by the Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (SCRAN) and NSW Government's Connected Classrooms Program involving the participation of the Australian Fossil and Mineral Museum, Bathurst, and the Western Plains Cultural Centre in Dubbo. We encourage further initiatives to build on this work.

3. SOURCES

¹ Throsby, David. *Does Australia Need a Cultural Policy?* Platform Papers no 7 January 2006. (Strawberry Hills, NSW: Currency House)

² See *Shooting the Pianist: the Role of Government in the Arts* / edited by Philip Parsons. (Sydney: Currency Press for the Australian Theatre Studies Centre, University of New South Wales, 1987). See *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy*. (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1994) See Australian government reports on the information economy and use of technology (most are available from the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, <http://www.dbcde.gov.au/>) include: *Australia's Strategic Framework for the Information Economy (2004-2006)*, *Opportunities and Challenges for the Information Age (2004)*; *Australian Government Support for ICT (2005)*; *Achieving Value from ICT: Key Management Strategies (2005)*; *The Role of ICT in Building Communities and Social Capital (2005)*, *ICT and Australian Productivity: Methodologies and Measurement (2005)*; *Community ICT Transformations: Next Steps (2005)*; *General Purpose Technologies and the Information Economy: an Evolutionary Approach to Macroeconomic Modelling (2006)*; *Estimating Aggregate Productivity Growth for Australia: the Role of Information and Communications Technology (2007)*; *Broadband in Regional Australia: Making a Difference (2007)*. Australian government reports relating to cultural heritage and creative industries include *Creative Industries Cluster Study (2002)*; *From Cottages to Corporations: Building a Global Industry from Australian Creativity: Report on Access to Overseas Markets for Australia's Creative Digital Industry (2003)*; *The Measurement of Creative Digital Content: a Study to Assess User Requirements for Creative Digital Content Statistics and a Possible Collection Strategy to Address Them (2003)*; *Research and Innovation Systems in the Production of Digital Content and Applications (2003)*; *The Role of Government Agencies as Market Place Participants in Digital Content Markets (2003)*; *Economic Benefits from Cultural Assets: the Digitisation Programs and Standards of Collecting Institutions and the Scope for Collaboration with the Creative Industries: Final Report (2003)*; *Unlocking the Potential: Digital Content Industry Action Agenda (2005)*; *Creative Innovation Economy Roundtable Report (2008)*.

³ Museums Australia (NSW). *Submission to Arts NSW on a Strategic Plan for the Visual Arts & Museum Sectors in NSW: Part 1 Supporting Community and Regional Museums & Galleries in NSW and Part 2 Selected Sources and Commentary (June 2011)* <http://museumsaustralia.org.au/site/nswdocs.php>

⁴ MANSW executive officer Paul Bentley has consolidated industry views in a number of articles for Thomson Reuters' publication *Online Currents*. Most are also published on the Wolanski Foundation website. See, for example, commentary on Tom Tague's views in *Talking Up the Back End of an Evolving Revolution* (<http://www.twf.org.au/research/Talkingupbackend.html>), David Bearman and Jennifer Trant in *Changing the Horseshoe on a Galloping Horse: Connecting Museums to Information Seekers* (<http://www.twf.org.au/research/changingthehorseshoe.html>), and on Professor Christine Borgman's comments in *Operating in a World of Ornate Variations and Tipping Points* (<http://www.twf.org.au/research/online2011pt2.html>). Another article relevant to policy considerations is *Mastering Digital Lives: Cultural Institutions Tackle the Tower of Babel* (dealing with personal digital archives and social media (<http://www.twf.org.au/research/Masteringdigitallives.html>)).

⁵ Prescott, Leah and Ricky Erway. *Single Search: The Quest for the Holy Grail*. Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research, 2011. <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2011/2011-17.pdf>.