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# **Submission to the Inquiry into Museums and Galleries**

Legislative Council  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4

**August 2016**

# Forward

The PSA makes this submission on behalf of its members in the NSW arts sector. Particularly, the submission focuses on recent industrial issues faced by employees including those in the Art Gallery of NSW, the Australian Museum and Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (the Powerhouse Museum). Overall the PSA is concerned with the continued cuts to arts and museum funding in NSW.

We see a direct link between deleting the positions of trained and experienced public service employees and the quality of services offered to the public in NSW galleries and museums.

The PSA is concerned with the NSW Government's focus on "efficiency" which can be at odds with ensuring a rich and diverse cultural landscape. These institutions exist for the public good. The notion of efficiency, when apply to these institutions serves no function but to legitimise the removal of resources. Further, PSA members have, in the main, not found that efficiency drives have resulted in a better working environment or improved services.

This submission includes a set of recommendations to help restore and grow the cultural fabric of NSW.

Anne Gardiner  
General Secretary

## 1 Introduction

The Public Service Association of NSW (PSA) is an active, member-driven union. Our members have a long and proud tradition of improving the lives of the people of New South Wales through delivering a diverse range of services in the public sector and related entities, state owned corporations, TAFE NSW and universities. We proudly represent 39,000 members spread over almost 5,000 worksites.

The PSA represents employees throughout the various museums and galleries operated by the NSW Government, including the Australian Museum, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences and the Art Gallery of NSW.

We welcome the opportunity to participate in this inquiry. The PSA is proud of the skill, professionalism and dedication of its members in the arts institutions who support the valuable cultural foundations of our community.

Yet, we observe that funding and support for galleries and museums has been under attack by the NSW Government including via wider programs of cuts such as the efficiency dividend. The PSA holds that the NSW Government must ensure that it makes a comprehensive and world-class commitment to the arts in NSW especially ensuring the diversity of cultural offerings and fair access to these resources for all the people in NSW. Championing a continued 'corporatisation' of the arts will not achieve this objective.

Forward policy needs to be developed recognising that all the great civilisations and cultures are seen through the artefacts they leave behind. Our museums, galleries and other art institutions help us to reflect on and understand our world, and to participate in building and creating our future.

This submission has been developed in consultation with members in the museums and galleries and draws upon their insight and experiences. It also draws upon the work the PSA has done in support of these members in recent years.

## 2.1 A multi-pronged and sustained attack on culture

On 1 July 2016 Elizabeth Farrelly wrote an article in the Sydney Morning Herald titled “We’re starving our culture with cut after cut”<sup>1</sup>. She made an overarching policy link between a move to one art school, vanishing climate science “and ‘voluntary’ reduction of the 200-year-old NSW Government Architect’s office from 240 active designers to three advisory lapdogs”. Ms Farrelly noted that this is not a few random cuts.

The PSA observes that there appears to be an ongoing ‘corporatisation’ of arts and science, and an attack on knowledge and creativity, promoted by Coalition Governments at State and Federal levels.

Ms Farrelly observes a tendency of current governments to assume that only profit-making enterprises are valuable. We even risk directing public funds to enhance these for profit ventures e.g. free public waterfront for Mr Packer’s mega-casino.

Efficiency dividends for arts and the science prevail at Commonwealth and State levels. Government arts employees and scientists have been repeatedly downsized.

Ms Farrelly rightly observes “The trashing of Sydney’s revered art nurseries will be no less damaging. Sydney has three main art schools, each with its own flavour: the National Art School is known for its atelier-type, skill-based teaching; University of Sydney’s Sydney College of the Arts, which for the past 20-odd years has occupied the magnificent Kirkbride asylum at Callan Park; and UNSW’s Art and Design (formerly COFA), seen as the most theoretical but also most “applied” of the three. With NSW TAFE Art and Design already slaughtered, this reduction is huge. In fine arts especially, diversity is key. Students are rightly furious.”

The Baird Government is highly focussed on infrastructure but appears to be poorly advised on arts policy and decisions, due to the de-skilling and downgrading of Arts NSW. It does not appear to recognise that it is highly skilled staff (and community partners and philanthropists) that build great museums and outstanding exhibitions – not just the infrastructure.

### Recommendation

**That the NSW Government ensure that decisions on funding and reform of museums, galleries and the arts more generally, are informed by input from affected staff, volunteers, communities, benefactors, donors, respected professionals in these fields and other stakeholders and have a focus on:**

- **Ensuring quality art and museum installations which reflect our cultural diversity, varied interests and educational aspirations**
- **Equitable access to these installations for all people in NSW**
- **Recognising international standards in art and museum installations and arts education, ensuring that funding and available roles in these areas are commensurate with this**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/were-starving-our-culture-with-cut-after-cut-20160630-gpv8p6.html>

- **Equitable access to arts education options that reflect a full range of art disciplines, sub-disciplines, philosophies and teaching approaches across university, vocational and community education**
- **Leveraging philanthropy funding for the arts when there are synergies between this and the above goals.**

## 2.2 Ensuring fairness and transparency in resource allocation for our museums and galleries

The table below includes some summary funding and staffing figures for the major NSW Government galleries and museums. But given that these institutions are funded by grants there is limited transparency as to the actual, most recent, trend in full time equivalent staff numbers. Annual report data is only available up to 2015-16 at this time which makes the impact of recent efficiency dividends unclear. Yet we are aware of staff reductions through restructures and contracting out of some functions.

Table 1: Key figures for selected NSW Government galleries and museums<sup>A</sup>

	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17 (forecast)	
	Exp. <sup>1</sup>	Staff	Exp.	Staff	Exp.	Staff	Exp.	Staff	Exp.	Staff
Aust. Museum	\$44.3m	307 <sup>2</sup>	\$44.8m	270	\$42.5m	270	\$45.4m	NA	\$43.3m	NA
Art Gallery	\$49.3m	226 <sup>3</sup>	\$44.8m	190	\$47.7m	205	\$43.1m	NA	\$42.5m	NA
MAAS <sup>4</sup>	\$46.8m	252 <sup>2</sup>	\$51.4m	243	\$45.3m	188	\$47.1m	NA	\$48.5m	NA

A: Institutions are those galleries and museums for which there is some data in the NSW Budget Papers

1: Expenditure from Budget papers - revised

2: Positions excluding casuals

3: Effective full time equivalents

4: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (Powerhouse Museum)

## Recommendation

**That the NSW Government provides public data on Full Time Equivalent staffing trends for all NSW Government galleries and museums and the reasons behind these trends. This should cover the period from the election of the O'Farrell Government to the forward estimates. This data should be provided so that it is released to match the budget expenditure data i.e. at this time the latest data should include FTEs for 2015-16 and forecast FTEs for 2016-17. Reductions in staff should be avoided in future and lost positions should be re-funded (see later recommendations).**

## 2.3 Ensuring a sound commitment to the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences

The impact of the efficiency dividend on the budget of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences over the last 10 years has seen in excess of 150 roles made forcibly redundant in the organisation. This has created substantial role-creep for staff remaining employed, and a reduction in the Museum's ability to provide services to the people of NSW. This has particularly impacted in the areas of access to the collection (outside of exhibitions), scholarly research on the collection, preservation and conservation work on the collection, regular changeover of exhibitions, and the privatisation and reduction of service in key areas – notably the Museum's Security area. The public-facing staff have been casualised with the exception of the management of that area. Although new positions have been created, these are primarily management and coordination roles; reducing overall non-executive roles.

While museum leadership has the main responsibility for these decisions, much of the decision making comes back to the impact of the efficiency dividend which has been in place for many years. There have been huge redundancies in all the museums and the gallery. Jobs have been downgraded, people have been offered their jobs back at a lower salary – in one case reportedly for \$20,000 per annum less, while SES jobs and salaries have increased.

There is now plenty of evidence that NSW is underperforming its museum peers by various measures. The NSW Auditor General has also reflected on these performance concerns. At the Powerhouse Museum staff numbers have declined by nearly 50% over 10 years, highly experienced senior curators have been replaced by junior generalist curators on lower salaries, while SES positions and salaries have increased and education staff have dropped from 27 in 2005, to just three in the last annual report. Expert regional services staff who travelled all over NSW were made redundant only to be replaced by a mainly telephone 'service' and assistance on a fee for service basis. Similar scenarios have played out across other museums.

### **Recommendation**

**That the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences be made exempt from the efficiency dividend, with overall staff numbers restored to 2005 levels.**

## **2.4 Reversing cuts to the Australian Museum**

NSW Government cuts to the Australian Museum over recent years have had a significant impact on the functioning of the institution. These cuts threaten the preservation of knowledge and artefacts in one of Australia's oldest natural history museums. In 2015 the government deleted one-third of the permanent full-time equivalent employees, including all in-house security guards and several highly skilled research staff. Of the museum's roughly 150 full-time equivalent employees, 50 jobs were made redundant, amounting to more than 1000 years of scientific and historic expertise at the museum.

Members of the PSA have expressed serious concerns about the removal of all in-house security staff. They have noted the museum's extensive collection houses historic artefacts valued at \$750 million and priceless national heirlooms such as Captain Cook's cape. The PSA notes that the head of production, one of the museum's librarians and the head of the scanning electron microscope lab used extensively in the museum's scientific research, were all made forcibly redundant. The cuts constitute an attack on public knowledge and the value of scientific learning and expertise.

### **Recommendation**

**That the NSW Government's cuts to the Australian Museum be reversed so the Museum has professional expertise commensurate with its collection and status.**

## **2.5 Ensuring the future of the Art Gallery of NSW**

The PSA highlights the high degree of dissatisfaction toward the government and senior management of the Gallery since 2013 when a large number of gallery officer positions were deleted and replaced with private security contractors. The PSA maintains that that this decision is not one made in the public interest. The gallery is a public institution and its

operations, including security, should remain accountable to the public. The mechanism for such accountability is not present when operations are taken over by the private sector.

Further, PSA members at the gallery have expressed deep concern over the lack of consultation and staff engagement during the most recent cuts to positions in September 2014. Surprise redundancies have generated a climate of fear whereby employees who wish to voice concerns about how the gallery operates can feel targeted and fall silent. Side stepping genuine consultation is unacceptable, and creates little confidence in senior management. Members feel there is a veil of secrecy over the decision making process within the Gallery's administration.

It is also essential that consultation takes into account the views of longstanding volunteers and supporters of the Gallery who have not been consulted about changes to the way the gallery operates and works with volunteers.

## **Recommendation**

**Gallery management should operate in a way which ensure senior management remains truly accountable to staff. In particular, the gallery should clearly communicate and genuinely take into consideration the views of its employees and volunteers when undertaking change management processes. Cuts to the Art Gallery and contracting out should be reviewed and reversed.**

## **2.6 Relocation**

The PSA notes that there has been controversy about the NSW Government's announced move of the Powerhouse Museum (Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences) to Parramatta. This is one of the considerations for this inquiry.

The PSA is concerned about a lack of transparency in this decision, and a lack of clarity as to whether all options and impacts have been properly assessed. A Fairfax freedom of information request revealed that the government itself cited community opposition as one of the major threats to the relocation of the museum.

No government anywhere in the world has ever sold off a major state museum less than thirty years after opening in an award winning, fit for purpose building, only to move the museum out of the city to create a smaller museum.

Our members have recognised that there is demand for a museum of this type both at the present location and in Western Sydney. The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences has the collection and capability to concurrently operate a site at Parramatta and in the city CBD – as long as appropriate resources are provided. The Museum already runs an accessible storage facility at Castle Hill. The reasoning given for the sale of the Ultimo site – a drop in visitation – is not substantiated by the data. The Ultimo Powerhouse Museum site remains popular, and has a growing audience.

Comprehensive consultation is required in planning for a new site at Parramatta. To create a great museum in Parramatta, the government needs to start with cultural planning and consultations with the people of Western Sydney and Parramatta, looking at where the gaps and opportunities are in Sydney museum's profile. The people of Western Sydney should be driving the museum's concept, planning and content through an open process of dialogue and real choices about the form and themes of the new museum. There are a number of

options for a new state museum in Parramatta which would arguably have a greater cultural and educational impact, and be more aligned with Western Sydney's cultures and audiences than the current museum relocation plan.

## **Recommendation**

**Although the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences opening a site at Parramatta is unanimously supported by members at the Museum, the Museum must also maintain its presence in Ultimo at the Museum's current site. There should be wide consultation on the planning for a Parramatta museum site and an openness to a focus more closely aligned with the needs of Western Sydney.**

### **Case Study – the NSW Migration Heritage Centre**

Members have provided this case study as an example of the practical impact of cuts to museums and galleries.

The NSW Migration Heritage Centre (MHC) was established in 1998, initially as a strategic initiative based in the Premier's Department and it was then located at the Powerhouse Museum from 2003. The initiative recognised that research and programming in the major cultural institutions was not reflecting the cultural diversity of NSW, and that action was needed to record the memories and experiences of aging post war migrants.

For over 10 years the MHC worked as a virtual museum, and as a three dimensional museum, archive and research centre. It commissioned exhibitions in partnership with regional museums, galleries, libraries and government museums and agencies.

The MHC led the way in designing online exhibitions, and with community support developed a unique archive of photos, object stories, oral histories, research reports, education resources, books and heritage trails.

The MHC was funded with a dedicated recurrent budget of \$370,000, with a further \$100,000 contributed by the Community Relations Commission (CRC). It had three staff and a web manager.

Following the appointment of new directors at the Powerhouse Museum, (Dawn Casey 2008-13 and Rose Hiscock 2013-15), the Migration Heritage Centre was mothballed and effectively abolished. This decision coincided with cuts to social history programs and exhibitions at the Powerhouse Museum, and the abolition of the Australian Communities Gallery that presented migration heritage exhibitions.

The museum accepted voluntary redundancy applications by the Centre's manager and website expert in 2012. The two remaining staff left in 2013. Multicultural NSW has been unable to provide the MHC with annual project funds (\$100,000) since the retirement of its long-standing Chair, Dr Stepan Kerkyasharian AO, in 2013.

No new MHC projects have been commissioned since 2012. Legacy projects are still being completed but without active engagement with communities. Stakeholders have expressed their concern and disquiet about the future of the MHC and the conservation of its valuable digital archives.

## **Recommendation**

**That the NSW Government investigate the decision to effectively abolish the NSW Migration Heritage Centre which was part of the Powerhouse Museum, review the impacts of this decision and restore funding and staffing to this important cultural function.**